

# Julian's Journal



# Chapter 1

## 1999

§ **December 27.** I can't believe we relinquished our sunny Sutter St. apartment for this dismal Edwardian dungeon! It's dank and cold, how I imagine dungeons must be, and beyond our means. We'll barely be able to come up with this month's rent. We spend all our time in one of the gloomy back rooms, while the front rooms remain unfurnished and cavernous. Lucie is desperately unhappy here—she does nothing but sip tea and watch television. Since we can't afford to move again (so soon, anyway), I suppose we'll have to make the best of it. Perhaps we'll feel more at home after we paint the kitchen and rip up the burnt orange shag carpet.

I listened to a Christian radio station at the office all day. I caught the end of a program called “Back to the Bible”; the speaker closed with “Have a good and godly day...it's not a good day unless it's a *godly* day.” This pious remark was followed by a half-hour of commercials targeted specifically at middle-class Christian consumers. There was one about strategic investing on which Pat Boone tells God-fearing listeners that “the Bible favours *tangible* investments, like silver and gold.” Afterwards, a personage calling himself the Bible Answer Man received telephone calls. One gentleman asked how Noah was able to fit all the world's animals into the ark—a fair question, considering the millions of insect species in the world alone.

“They didn't have to take every *kind* of animal, only every *type*,” was his answer. “Also, they didn't have to take the *whole* dinosaur...they could have just taken a dinosaur egg.”

The next caller was a woman who asked, “What about the animals in

Australia...how did *they* get there?"

The Bible Answer Man responded authoritatively, "You have to remember that before the *catastrophism* [sic], the earth looked very different than it does today."

§ **December 28.** We were jarred awake at three-ish by a terrific *fracas* just outside our window—hideous, infernal gurgling noises, perhaps made by two fighting raccoons.

It was another peaceful day at the office, with so many colleagues still on holiday. My new office is really shaping up, I've decorated it in Chinese Modern with two large watercolours in bold asymmetrical frames (bought at Percy and Duke's latest garage sale) and various *objets d'art* that don't fit in with the décor of our dungeon.

After work Lucie and I went to see *The Talented Mr. Ripley* at an immense downtown multi-screen movie theater complex. We were too early, so we decided to dine first. After wandering aimlessly around the neighborhood (neither of us was particularly hungry) we were attracted to an oyster house with a lovely neon sign.

The place was deserted. Lucie and I took a seat in a curved booth against the wall while the waiter filled our water glasses and handed us menus. The walls were adorned with old San Francisco memorabilia—earthquake photos from 1906 and 1989, bad pointillist paintings of cable cars and the Golden Gate Bridge, framed reviews of the establishment from local newspapers and magazines, signed photos of people who had eaten there (Mayor Willie Brown, Fran Tarkenton, Gary Coleman), &c.

The meal was not quite inedible. Lucie's pesto tasted as if from the can. She complained to the waiter, an Indian who had the annoying habit of saying "You're welcome" after everything he did, who kindly did not charge us for it. My fish 'n' chips was fishy, at best, but I kept my mouth shut.

*The Talented Mr. Ripley* was splendid. I adored the insidious Freddie Miles—I used to know lads like that in high school who had a talent for finding your buttons and pushing them. Mr. Minghella did a fine job recreating that '50s *la dolce vita* look. The film's beauty made me long for the Mediterranean as well as a time (which may have only existed in movies?) when people had style and manners. I sometimes feel as desperate as Tom Ripley, not necessarily for his life as portrayed in the film, but for any life independent of paid employment.

On our way up the front steps of our flat, someone shone a red laser beam at us from across the street. We ignored it completely, which hopefully infuriated whomever was doing it. There were fourteen messages on the answering machine, the first being from Mother who called to see if her gift package had arrived yet (it had not); the rest being from the insufferable Mr. P.

To help meet the expenses of our new bourgeois lifestyle, I have for an acquaintance been editing a book entitled *Rainbow Dreams: A Theory for a New Utopia*. In it, Mr. P. considers such complex notions as “the ever-unfolding and infinite creativity of the perpetual motion of the universe” and “our right-brain and left-brain synergies, which are our true powers.” Later, he dismisses in a single sentence the life work of Einstein, Newton, Freud, et al., claiming their contributions to science have “precluded the synergy for wisdom, and thus, fire” and “impacted not only our intellectual, emotion, and physical well-being, but also to the extent to which civilization is in alignment with the interrelated and brilliant flows of the universe.” (The cryptic phrase “brilliant flows” appears dozens of times throughout the manuscript.) Because I was out of town for a couple of weeks for the holidays, I knew he would be anxious to hear from me.

The messages increased in urgency until the last, in which he said, “I, ahh, *ham!* want *Rainbow Dreams* back. I think you’re very unprofessional and I will take legal action if you do not *ham!* Fed-Ex it to me immediately. I...you, uh, *ham!* must also send me a signed letter stating I...you have not made any copies of the *ham!* or shown it to anyone else. I’m sorry *ham!* that I ever...I should never have let you edit *ham! Rainbow Dreams*.” His voice faltered as he spoke, as if he might start bawling at any moment. His speech was also punctuated by loud coughs which sounded like he was shouting the word “ham”.

I don’t know what I could have done to make Mr. P. turn on me in this fashion, although I do suspect the man suffers from low self-esteem and has “issues” regarding rejection. He told me he had given drafts of the manuscript to a Berkeley philosophy professor, his doctor, and a fireman(!), none of whom responded. I think he simply thought I was snubbing him like so many others and overreacted when I wasn’t around to return his calls. For someone writing a whole book about peace on earth, one would think Mr. P. wouldn’t be so litigious and goofy.

Lucie and I stayed at work until 5:30. Just before we left, Binky Harrington stopped by my office to give me some documents. Her poodle Lord

Fauntleroy pranced in behind her and urinated on a bookcase. I was very calm about it. “Oh, it’s nothing...pets are *worth* it, aren’t they?” She cleaned the mess with a giant wad of paper towels and we continued our conversation as if nothing had happened, while I concealed my disgust. After she left I discovered wet spots on a vintage set of encyclopedias I had planned to sell on eBay.

§ **December 29.** We were awakened at 5:48 a.m. by a commotion from the hideous religious edifice next door, which has just opened their doors to the homeless for the winter. The poor souls are let in at 10:00 p.m., which naturally generates a bit of noise, and are made to leave at 6:00 the next morning. But it’s the employees of the shelter who are to blame for disturbing our dreams. During the night, they and their accomplices congregate in the parking lot, opening and slamming car doors, revving and idling engines, shouting profanity, dribbling basketballs, and playing rap music. When I ask them politely to be quiet, they always acquiesce but then it’s *status quo*, and this morning was no different. I opened the window and boomed, “I say, could you please *pipe down*? We’re trying to get some *shut-eye* in here.” A sassy girl’s voice replied from the shadows, “Y’all go back to sleep, we’re leavin’ right now.”

“Do let’s hurry it up, then,” I growled.

“I guess you showed *them*, honey,” Lucie whispered in the darkness, but it was rather a long time before the din finally subsided.

At lunch I went to the post office to mail Mr. P.’s manuscript and to pick up the package from Mother. Why they hadn’t delivered it to me sooner no longer interested me at this point, I was just glad to have it at last. I took it back to work and Lucie and I opened it in her office, getting confetti, Styrofoam peanuts, and wrapping paper everywhere. Among the gifts in the box was a large chocolate Santa, on whose head I am gnawing right now.

§ **December 30.** This morning on the bus we lost a passenger. I heard a gargling sound and turned around to see a gentleman slumped forward in his seat. He was innocent of shoes and was wearing a soiled Santa Claus jacket and acrylic pink “jogging” shorts (alas, with no underwear). I had never seen a corpse before; I could only stare dumbly while others scrambled to his aid. The driver dutifully pulled over to wait for an ambulance while the passengers congregated by the curb, not knowing what to do. I ran

across Van Ness hoping to catch the 42, but then another 5 came along so I boarded it with everyone else.

Mr. Parent stopped by my office to introduce a new employee, a skeletal man with a long, sharp nose and protruding eyes, who resembles the Snow Miser (of *Year Without a Santa Claus* fame). His name is Jeffrey and his office is next to mine.

§ **December 31.** Slept until 2:30. Today Lucie and I bickered over chores. It's more difficult to keep a huge flat clean than a studio apartment, and I admit I have been overly idle of late. After we kissed and made up, we watched New Year's celebrations around the world on CNN. I waited expectantly for news of the much anticipated "armageddon" but it was for some reason not mentioned. At 3:00 they showed the Eiffel Tower, resplendent with pyrotechnics, the magnificence of which brought a tear to my eye. How I miss Paris! To bed at 11:59.





# Chapter 2

## 2000

§ **January 1.** One year to go before the new millennium *really* begins. Slept until noon. I had expected a long, arduous night, but I was awakened only occasionally by a Piccolo Pete, tootling horn, or drunken chortle. After spending the afternoon dressing ourselves, we removed upstairs for Mrs. Roper’s “Hoppin’ John” party.

Mrs. Roper was barefooted under a splendid Oriental silk robe. Her phlegmatic daughters were in the kitchen, chopping onions and condemning our presence with their expressionless, cinder-block faces. One daughter wore a men’s double-breasted flannel suit and round, thick glasses which obviously weren’t hers. The other daughter declared her fashion statement with faded denim overalls over a red and green snowflake sweater and rainbow-coloured “toe” socks.

After exchanging pleasant banalities with a sunburned man drinking something from a Thermos, we took a seat on a chair shaped like a hand and ate our beans and cornbread in silence while the other guests chatted in small groups. Someone played “Chopsticks” on the harpsichord. By degrees introductions were made and soon we found ourselves discussing eating disorders with a turtle-necked psychiatrist named Dick. Presently, Dick’s squeaky-clean and *much* younger boyfriend Cristo (whose name I misheard as “Crisco” but fortunately I didn’t call him that) appeared and whispered something in Dick’s ear with a lascivious grin. Cristo had just-washed bleach blond hair and a meticulously groomed five-o’clock shadow, and was smoking a marijuana cigarette in a long cigarette holder. Whatever he said, it

caused Dick to snort with laughter. The two then excused themselves and disappeared into the water closet.

Lucie and I wandered about sipping wine and looking at photographs on the walls. There was one from the Vietnam era of Mrs. Roper and Julia Child downstairs in our kitchen, holding hands and looking very much like Grateful Dead groupies. In another photo, a naked, skeletal man is shown emerging from a small hole in the ground, his gray, navel-length beard in braids. When the doorbell rang, we took the opportunity to slip out unnoticed.

My New Year's resolutions, if I must make any, are as follows: to eat better; to dress better; to read more; to write more; to drink more; to be more sociable. I wonder what last year's were?

§ **January 2.** At 4:07 I was awakened by a noisy hobo. He was standing at the locked gates to the church parking lot, demanding to be let in. He kept jiggling the chains and shouting, "Anybody home?" Finally, I opened the window and shouted in my best Freddie Fillmore voice, "Eeeyesssss?"

"Will you let me in?"

"Nooooooo!"

I shut the window, and as I slipped between the sheets and closed my eyes I could hear the hobo whining, "Please...open the damn gate!" followed by violent chain-jiggling and a long, ululant yowl. It bothers me a little bit that I teased the poor fellow, but I'm fed up with the *ad hoc* shelter next door. *Not in my backyard*, as they say. Anyway, I don't work there and couldn't have let him in even if I had wanted to.

We watched the marvelous *Footlight Parade* today. Ruby Keeler and Billy Taft's rendition of "Sittin' on a Back Yard Fence" is just about the cutest thing I have ever seen in my whole life. Afterwards Lucie and I took a long stroll to North Beach and, just for a chuckle, looked at a few rooms for rent along the way. Like our own abode, they were dreary and over-priced. One contained a graffiti-covered ice box, while another one had mouldy Astroturf in the bathroom, the ceiling of which was so low as to touch my impeccably shellac'd hair. On the way home we stopped at the druggist's to get ear plugs and hummingbird food.

§ **January 3.** The new ear plugs are uncomfortable but effective, but Lucie refuses them, fearing she might sleep through an emergency. She asked

this morning if I had heard the fuss last night, which I had not. She said a fellow had sat below our window for some time moaning and repeating the name “Jesus Christ.”

Today at the office I had a meeting with Jeffrey to shew him the ropes. When I appeared at his door, he didn’t hear me say “Good morning” because he was wearing a bulky set of headphones. Later, when I observed them up close, I realised they weren’t headphones for listening to Schubert, they’re the kind one would wear on the tarmac or at the firing range to protect the ear. I should get some of those to wear in bed!

§ **January 4.** I don’t like the ear plugs anymore. They block out external noises but not internal ones such as the creak of my joints or my beating heart, uncomfortable reminders of one’s mortality.

Lucie woke me up at 2:00 to say there was vicious snarling outside our window. Mr. Darcy heard it, too. He stood chattering excitedly among the heavy velvet drapes. After a moment the snarling ceased. It was probably nothing more than a furious skunk.

After an enormous dinner at an unremarkable neighborhood eatery, we went to see Woody Allen’s new film *Sweet and Lowdown*. While it’s not his best effort (I prefer his mid-career dramas) there is much to enjoy in it—Uma Thurman’s exquisite dresses, the gorgeous interiors, the fabulous gypsy jazz soundtrack, and Samantha Morton’s sad, quizzical smile.

§ **January 5.** As usual, I struggled to stay awake at this morning’s general staff meeting, which was exceptionally dull because so many are still on vacation. I suffered through it wondering what it would be like if the ceiling collapsed and I was trapped in the meeting room with my colleagues with no hope of escape or rescue. Who would seek comfort with whom? Who would be the first to perish and would we have to eat them? Would I have to drink my own urine?

After the meeting I saw Jeffrey drop a bottle of Snapple in the hall. He then slapped himself on the face and hissed, “You big dummy!” Sometimes when I leave my office door open, I can hear him talking to himself in his office. It sounds like he’s merely thinking out loud, but what’s strange is that he never stops, not even for one instant. The most common phrases I’m able to make out are “hocus pocus,” “whoopsy daisy!” and his own repeated name.

§ **January 6.** On the train to work this morning the conductor announced there was a broken rail at Peninsula Ave., and that we would have to creep over it slowly. Presently she said, “We’re crossing over it now, let’s see if we can feel it,” eliciting chuckles from the morning-weary passengers and faint eye rolling from myself.

I received in the mail a much-deserved check from Mr. P., which I immediately spent on literature at lunchtime, including a folio-sized scrapbook on Scott Fitzgerald which I will begin reading right away.

On the 42 bus I sat opposite a Bedouin excitedly talking to himself. Next to him sat an obviously suffering woman who leaned away from the man at a forty-five degree angle. When another seat became available she took it, but the Bedouin followed. He then began wildly picking his nose. I stared my shoes to avoid his mad gaze.

When I got home Lucie was away at her ballet class. A tasty shepherd’s pie was waiting for me in the oven.

§ **January 7.** At work Lucie received a cryptic courriel from a Mr. Alan Smalls which said, “Nice try! No cigar, loser!” Shortly thereafter we figured out that Mr. Smalls had outbid Lucie for a set of crystal goblets on eBay. I sent Mr. Smalls an angry reply which said, “How dare you insult my wife,” &c.

We had a middling dinner at Villa Romano, which isn’t the same restaurant it was when we first dined there. It used to have a candid charm about it. The waitresses were Russian and plump in their old-fashioned uniforms; the jukeboxes in each booth played Domenico Modugno and Aurelio Fierro; and the olive oil flowed freely. Now the place appears to be under new management, although I recognized the old cook whirling pizza crusts into the air. Now, Mariah Carey shrieks from a high-tech sound system with hidden tweeters. Ambitious, young go-getters fiddle with their personal electronic gadgets while their dates bat their eyelashes at them admiringly. BMWs are double-parked out front. Where did these people come from?

While waiting for our food I caught a glimpse of the hostess sitting on the floor, laughing hysterically at something a group of young men in oversized utility garments were telling her. Her face was pierced and and her head shaven like that of a convict. Her jeans had slid dangerously low on her gaunt frame, exposing a fluorescent pink acrylic thong undergarment and a sinister-looking tattoo of some reptile god just above her coccyx. I saw no

sign of the old hostess, a delightful Estonian farm girl (or so I imagined her) named Heidi.

As we ate, the waiter-to-diner ratio approached 1:1; bored young teenagers whom I at first didn't realise worked there kept asking us phonetically if we wanted "fresh ground *paper*."

After dinner we went to a nearby video rental establishment to rent *Plein soleil*, the original version of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. The counter help had never heard of it, which didn't surprise me, but it was only after I had gotten home and looked it up did I learn that I should have asked for it by its English title, *Purple Noon*.

§ **January 8.** After a fine dinner out, we went to the opera. I was too warm in my '40s-era wool tuxedo, which is simply too heavy for the mild San Francisco climate. Lucie looked ravishing in her vintage black silk velvet dress, but halfway through the performance the seams began to fail everywhere at once. Lucie began to panic, so I rushed downstairs to retrieve her coat; by the time we got home the dress was in ribbons.

§ **January 9.** I spent all morning raking up dead pine needles and leaves from the garden, which Mrs. Roper has let fall into a state of ruin. In the back of the garden is an ancient wooden platform, from which I cleared decades of detritus, including a dozen headless garden gnomes. The one gnome which still had its head I kept; someone had painted upon it fangs, eyeliner, and black lipstick. Lucie yanked up a bunch of spider plants some witless former tenant had left behind. Later, we encouraged the growth of moss by applying a mixture of yogurt and dirt between the flagstones of the path. The work was invigorating; although it was a bit chilly it was nice to be active out of doors.

§ **January 10.** This evening I was walking around the flat barefoot when I felt a sharp pain in my toe, as if I had been bitten by a pest. I washed the toe and examined it but saw nothing out of the ordinary. The pain grew worse as I hoovered the rugs in the foyer. The next time I looked there was a black bruise the size of a quarter, which is odd because I never bruise.

§ **January 11.** Lew Elliot, whom we haven't seen in five years, has come to visit us from Austin. We almost didn't recognize him at the airport; he has cut his hair and is now sporting an extraordinary beard.

Lucie cooked a chicken with potatoes and lima beans. We stayed up past midnight talking about James Joyce, Austin, cooking, and people we knew; Maggie Kahn's name was brought up more than a few times. Lew knew she had been working for a Lesbian magazine, but was surprised when we told him she had married a transvestite named Simba.

Lew brought us a nicely bound copy of his sonnets *Unworthy Epistles*, as well as a stack to sell at City Lights. They have a strong classical flavour to them, not unlike those of Jack Gilbert. I am a bit envious he should have a collection of sonnets when I have nothing to shew for all my scribblings, except this journal and a few short stories I recall with a grimace.

§ **January 12.** Today I dug up some poems I had written a dozen years ago. Most of them (all of them, actually) are quite bad. I also read with some embarrassment two miserable short stories which never should have existed. I look at them now and can't believe I ever took them seriously.

Lew is visiting friends today, so Lucie and I watched *The King of Jazz*. Afterwards, I transferred some of the better numbers to a "recordable compact disc" (which holds up to eighty minutes of music and can be played back with a laser beam—what *will* they think of next?), including a sensational version of "Happy Feet". After the 'Boys sing a verse or two, two "it" girls (credited as the "Sisters G.") sing the rest in English and German in uncanny, love-in-the-mist voices. Who are they, I wonder, as I have never heard of them.

§ **January 13.** I played tour guide to Lew today, taking him to see the view from Twin Peaks, the fog-bound beach, the ruins of the baths, Fort Point and other points of Hitchcockian interest, Anton LaVey's house, the Tosca Café and its opera-filled jukebox, the sinister Li Po, various monuments (Lotta's Fountain and the far more interesting Native Sons of the Golden West monument, with its snakes and octopi, one block down), Mission Dolores, the steepest street in the city, Vermont Street, &c. We ate luncheon at a place out in the Richmond called Mr. Hotdog's Rancho Burgers. Chinese-owned and operated, Mr. Hotdog's is a relic of the burger joint era. It has its original milk can bar stools, wagon wheel chandeliers, and

swinging saloon doors. Above the grill is a “For Sale” sign (the kind one puts in the back of a car window) on which is written “Steak”. I practised my Chinese with the darling proprietress, who told Lew and I that we were “so, so handsome.” Afterwards, I took Lew to Berkeley to see a girl he had met on the World Wide Web. She wasn’t at home, so he and I went instead to several used bookstores.

For dinner Lew and I ate leftovers while Lucie entertained us on her accordion, slogging quite admirably through a couple of Gus Viseur classics. She has made substantial progress; I wish I could say the same for my ukulele playing.

§ **January 18.** Lew stayed longer than we had anticipated (*mea culpa*), and so was still here the morning Jack and Harriet arrived from Arizona. Fortunately, Lew was able to go stay with a colleague in Napa.

Jack, who besides playing for jazz bands repairs and restores pianos for a living, wants to give us an 1885 Steinway concert grand, but first he has to put it together; it also needs a new pin block and strings. Lucie and I are keeping our fingers crossed. For once, we have room for a piano.

§ **January 19.** Jack played us tapes of music he had composed and recorded which was surprisingly avant-garde, such as the Cageian “Sonata for Two Prepared Pianos” and “Dialog for Vibes and Percussion”. Lucie asked Jack why he never became famous and he replied, “Well, I have no use for fame and all that, but some of my acquaintances went on to become famous.”

“Really, like who?” we cried.

“Well, let’s see...there was Rip Wakefield.” Jack began all his sentences with “well”.

“Rick Wakeman?”

“No, Rip Wakefield. Rip was a trumpeter who was very well-known and very talented. We played in an Afro-Cuban jazz band together back in the ’70s. He played with Archie McNabb and later, Sal Rubenson.”

“Who else did you know?”

“Well, I knew Stephen Brehmer. I knew him very well, as a matter of fact. We shared a motel room in Telluride for two months.”

Lucie and I exchanged puzzled glances and shook our heads. “I don’t recognize the name. Who is he?”

“Well, besides writing the theme to “The Bennie High Show”, Stephen Brehmer was a virtuoso whistler. He appeared on many television shows throughout the ’60s and ’70s, including “Bennie High”, no, it was “Johnny High”, I think, and many others.”

“Hey, Dad, one time I won a whistling contest!”

“You did? Well I’d like to hear about that!”

“When I was six, Mom took me down to McDo to meet Ronald McDonald. I think it was my birthday or something...no, there were lots of people there, and there were contests and prizes and stuff. I was in the whistling contest. You had to eat a bunch of saltine crackers, then be the first one to whistle. I won. The prize was a plastic tube of miniature plastic toys. I couldn’t believe I had won!”

Jack and Harriet laughed heartily, then Jack asked, “Well, why do you call it McDo?”

“That’s what they call it in France. We thought it was funny and so we started calling it that, too,” Lucie explained.

“McDo’s, eh? Well if that ain’t a *hoot*!”

§ **January 20.** Jack and Harriet left this morning. We’ve got the house to ourselves again, and it has never felt bigger or colder.

At work today I received a call from Mr. P., apologizing for his bad behaviour and asking me if I would please continue editing his book. I politely but firmly refused, and suggested he find someone else to do it, someone with a fresh point of view (*that’s the ticket*). I was careful to be nice to him because I don’t want to find him snarling outside our bedroom window some night!

On the way home Lucie and I stopped by a sporting goods store to get Monty a ping pong ball. While Lucie was testing out a stationary bike, a snot-nosed brat kicked its wheel. The attack was vicious and unprovoked; when I searched the store to confront the little ragamuffin he had disappeared.

§ **January 21.** High words were exchanged at 5:37 this morning regarding the rap music throbbing from the parking lot next door. Later in the morning I called and complained to the Reverend Dr. White, who was surprisingly sympathetic. In fact, he said he would “take care of the problem *today*.” *A man of action!* I wonder what he’s going to do?



On the way to work I saw a discarded plastic party platter by the curb. On it were little pieces of rye bread, carrot sticks, radishes, and smeared dip. In the midst of it all was an enormous rat, chomping on a piece of celery.

§ **January 24.** Rev. White has done nothing that I know of to stop the noise next door. At lunch I mailed him a letter begging him for assistance.

The commute home put me in a bad mood. The train was crowded, hot, and late. There was a hyperactive lad upstairs who was bouncing around like an orangutan. Somehow, his bracelet ended up on the other side of the car, and he started screaming, “My bracelet, my bracelet, my bracelet!” He and his father had to go downstairs and then up the opposite stairs to retrieve it (I don’t know why the father didn’t simply ask a passenger to hand it to them across the aisle). The lad was nervous about leaving his seat and kept shouting, “Remember, everybody, I’m going to Redwood City!”

While waiting for the 42 on the way home, an African-American gentleman dressed in the manner of Louis Farrakhan approached me.

“Can I *axe* you a question?”

“Chop away.” I prepared myself mentally for unpleasantness.

“What *time* is it?” he said, pointing to his bare wrist.

“6:41.” My answer seemed to satisfy the man for a few moments, but since he wanted something from me, he couldn’t resist the urge to continue speaking.

“That’s a *sweet* suit you got on, man.” I acknowledged his complement with a slight nod. “Say, you’re waitin’ for the *bus*, ain’t cha? Do you use a *pass* or a *dollar*?”

“What?” I thought the question was a bit personal, but since I felt cornered I answered anyway. “I usually pay with a *token*.” I emphasized the word “token” to avoid the subject of money.

“Oh...uh, can you give me a dollar for four quarters? I’m not asking for *money*.”

“What do you want a dollar bill for?”

“Because I don’t want all this change janglin’ around in my pockets,” he said, thrusting his hands in his pockets and janglin’ his change. Sensing my doubt, he continued, “I’m from L.A., I’m not going to *rob* you. Here...here’s four quarters,” and handed me a handful of dimes, nickels, and pennies.

“Oh, *very well*,” I sighed, taking the change and handing him a dollar bill.

“Thanks, brother. That’s a nice *suit* you got on!” As he walked away he turned and added, “Now that wasn’t so *hard*, was it?” I bit one of the coins to make sure it was real.

§ **January 26.** Lucie and I want to move again. The rent is too high, we’re sick of the noise, and we miss the bustle of downtown. We told Mrs. Roper right away. She seemed strangely unconcerned, as if she had expected (or hoped for it) it all along.

§ **January 27.** On the way home from work an old wino got on the bus muttering and waving a tiny plastic axe. He was covered head-to-toe with what appeared to be chimney soot. I couldn’t hear what he was saying, but apparently he was upsetting some passengers. At the next stop two homosexuals took away his axe and shoo’d him out the back door. As the bus drove away the wino ran alongside it for a moment before trying to kick the bus but missed and fell face-down in the gutter. The bus driver seemed not to have noticed any of this.

We saw Dudley Dooright (Maggie Kahn’s ex-husband; we call him Dudley Dooright because of his enormous cleft chin) on “Antiques Roadshow”. A lumpy woman in a knee-length Florida Marlins t-shirt had brought onto the show a German Victorian flue cover depicting a badly painted clown and a ballerina. Lucie and I laughed at it, but Dudley proclaimed it “could fetch \$150 to \$200 at auction.”

Lucie and I wondered if we owned anything that would be worth bringing to “Antiques Roadshow”. Apart from some rare books, we have a sun-faded Navajo rug Lucie inherited from her grandmother.

§ **January 28.** Last night we saw an early hominid smoking a crack pipe on our front porch. He didn’t react when I turned on the porch light, so I flicked it on and off for several minutes before he finally shambled away.

I think we found rooms in Wilder’s building near Union Square. We’ll probably make a decision Thursday, but we have a few more places to look at first.

§ **February 3.** We signed a lease on a pretty but tiny studio at 520 Geary St. Move-in costs were \$3,300, which we paid for with a cash advance from my credit card. Although we hope to pay some of it back with the money we'll make at our moving sale this weekend, the new debt makes me nervous.

§ **February 4.** I received a courriel that's been going around the office asking people who they'd invite to a "fantasy dinner"; ten people living or dead with whom you'd want to dine. Out of boredom, I responded with a list of the ten people with whom I'd *least* like to dine:

1. Tonya Harding
2. Courtney Love
3. Crocodile Dundee/Kato Caelin (tie)
4. Imelda Marcos
5. Ted Nugent
6. Stephen Seagal
7. Dr. Laura Schlessinger
8. Janice Dickinson
9. Thomas Kinkade, "Painter of Light"
10. Billy Idol

The Fantasy *Nightmare* Dinner will be held at Fortune's, Trump Plaza; dinner prepared at our table by Michael Chiarello; infotainment by Carrot Top; and musical entertainment by Daddy Freddy, the world's fastest rapper.

For the rest of the afternoon, I agonized over who my real fantasy guests would be, finally deciding on the following motley group (I wonder how these people would get along), all of whom are living at the time of this writing:

1. Lux & Ivy
2. The Brothers Quay
3. Crispin Glover
4. David Lynch
5. Marilyn Manson
6. Sonia Rykiel
7. Jean-Pierre Jeunet

8. Jean-Pierre L éaud
9. Doran Wittelsbach
10. Steve Pemberton

The dinner will be at La Palette on the rue de Seine, Paris; dinner prepared by Jacques Pépin and Julia Child; with musical entertainment by Lech Jankowski.

When we returned from work we saw a pile of Mrs. Roper's mail on a chair in our foyer. When I confronted her about it she said she had let herself in to see what we were selling. She didn't apologize for her invasion of our privacy but did offer us \$50 for the Kitchen Aid mixer. She said she was going to bequeath it to one of her daughters after she died.

§ **February 4.** Although the sale was advertised to begin at 9:00, the doorbell rang this morning at 8:15; there was a mob on the front steps. Against our better judgment, we let them in while Lucie and I took turns brushing our teeth.

A shabby couple came in and the man headed straight for the stapler. After examining it carefully, he clutched it to his breast. *What do you have?* his wife demanded. *Put that down, we don't need one of those!*

"But it's only ten cents!" he whined.

After lunch I noticed the typewriter had not yet been sold, but one prospective buyer had typed the following: `jp align="center ;font size="3" face="Courier New party tonight in bethlehem everyone invited`

jesus is the son of god

By 5:00 we had sold everything except for a forlorn bag of dice and the Gothic garden gnome.

§ **February 7.** At work today I bumped into our creepy Lotus Notes guy, T-Bone. He was looking in the mirror at his eye.

"What's the matter with your eye?" I asked.

"It's blepharitis, or inflammation of the eyelid."

It annoyed me to see him, because it seems like every time I go to the men's room T-Bone is already in there, or he comes in right after me.

Lucie called me at lunch; we were both playing Solitaire on the computer. We spoke for a long time before I said I had to change ears. Lucie asked if

I had “cauliflower ear” and I said, “What’s that?”, and she said that’s what boxers get when they are hit in the ear too much. After we hung up, I looked out the window and saw a sign in a window of the building across the street which said, “Hi.”

Lately Lucie and I have become obsessed with the movies of Busby Berkeley. Last night we watched *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1935*. Ruby Keeler is a sweetie. And so is Joan Blondell, but a tough sweetie, a girly girl who can’t be pushed around. I used to think Dick Powell was goofy but he is growing on me. Tonight we’ll watch *Dames*.

§ **February 8.** Last night I dreamt I was being given a ride to work in an old pickup by midget actor Billy Barty. He was sitting on a couple of phone books so he could see over the steering wheel. On our way, he produced a plate of broken bits of chocolate. “Help yourself. It was a Cadbury Chocolate Sword but it broke.”

I ate some of the sword, and then he handed me a small, tattered notebook. Inside were two strange objects in protective archival sleeves. “You like doze?” he asked.

“What are they?”

“What do you think they are?”

“They look like, um...Nazi light switch plates.”

“That’s right. Do you like ‘em?” He was grinning and nodding his head, as if he assumed I would agree.

“No, not really.”

He gave me a doubtful glance and said, “Those Nazi light switch plates were presented to me by the Emperor Hirohito in WWII.” He pronounced it “dub-yah dub-yah tew”.

After he dropped me off at work I realised I still had the midget’s notebook. When I tried to call him in Hollywood an old-timey switchboard operator told me in French, *he is dead*. I told her he wasn’t and that I had his Nazi memorabilia but she just laughed and hung up on me.

§ **February 9.** Someone broke into the flivver last night. He smashed the rear passenger window and stole about \$.30 in change and a Rameau disc. What bum listens to Rameau? My heart sank as I pictured him playing it,

making a face, then throwing it away in disgust, the disc rolling into the street where it is run over by a Mack truck.

§ **February 10.** On the bus home a smelly person sat next to me and began burning a \$5 bill with a lighter. I can't even afford to do that. After he got off another gentleman sat down, crowding me because his legs were spread too widely. When I asked him politely to give me some room, he looked at me like I had just spoken gibberish, but did not close his legs.

This evening Lucie complained about Ajay in Marketing. Whenever she says hello to him he responds with a grunt or not at all. After we had talked about it for a few minutes, she casually mentioned that she had told him his teeth looked like vampire teeth.

"Lucie!"

She chuckled. "What?"

"Don't be coy. You know perfectly well that's the reason he snubs you now."

"Well...they *do* look like vampire teeth!"

§ **December 20.** To-day was my last public performance as a composer of electronic music, on Winston's afternoon radio program. After setting up my equipment, Winston let me play "as long as I wanted," so I improvised a piece of appalling noise and called it "Feedback Sonata No. 1", after some earlier pieces I had recorded in 1988 with microphones, plastic milk jugs, various modified guitar pedals, and several bass guitar amplifiers arranged in a circle. After the performance, Winston interviewed me for fifteen minutes, whereby we talked about the past and future of the "noise" genre in music. It was the first time I had ever been interviewed about my own music when I wasn't associated with a band, and it will probably be the last. I enjoyed talking about myself, and was disappointed when the interview drew to a close. As I loaded the car with my equipment, I wondered what I should do with it all.

§ **December 29.** I am definitely no longer interested in making music, I have decided to sell all my equipment (except for my guitar and ukulele), which we have no room for anyway in our tiny apartment. Much of it I will dispose of at auction; the rest I will take to a store I know in Berkeley which

pays well for vintage electronics. Oddly, I shall miss none of it; besides the Throbbing Gristle and Non, I can hardly say I even listen to noise anymore, which bores me. Lately, all I seem to want to listen to is '20s jazz, which I am studying with a great appetite. I've purchased every CD I could find and have now resorted to collecting 78s; there are so many treasures to discover!





# Chapter 3

## 2001

§ **January 1.** Twenty-ought-one. I was rudely awakened at dawn by that ubiquitous ditty which goes, “Whoops, I did it again!” I stumbled to the window and looked down to see a muscular youth cleaning an automobile with a bottle of cleaner and a cotton swab. It was one of those cars with tacky, gold plastic trim, tiny circus wheels, and loaded with cheap auto accessories. A big plastic air intake on the hood suggested the possibility of supersonic speed. The windscreen was emblazoned with its make in a vicious-looking typeface, and the rear window was graced with a cartoon decal of a urinating boy. At last, the parking attendant appeared from the bushes and made the proud automobile owner turn down his radio. I returned to bed and slept until noon.

Lucie and I took our lunch at the diner, which was packed with bleary-eyed, hungover tourists—what exactly *were* they celebrating? The passage of another dreary century or the dawn of another? Later, we went to the Castro to see Kenneth about the apartment. We were early, so we went into a homosexual novelty shop. Lucie and I regarded with bewilderment at all the perverted merchandise—cartoon-shaped dildos, naughty games, drink dispensers in the shape of urinating boys, genitalia key chains, &c.

We went across the street to an ice cream parlour, where a fellow with artificially enlarged lips was gabbing on a tiny cordless telephone behind the counter. He seemed annoyed that we had entered. I ordered an expensive strawberry milkshake, which took him an eternity to make with his one free hand. It was too thick to drink with a straw, which was a damned nuisance,

so I picked at it with a small plastic spoon.

After our rendezvous with Jean-Luc, we took the F home on our favourite vintage streetcar, one of the orange ones from Italy. Since these wonderful old vehicles are usually kept in immaculate condition by the city, I was saddened to see that a simpleton had carved the word “ass” into the beautiful wood paneling. How I should like to carve that word into his forehead! With so few beautiful things in this world, I can’t understand why someone would wish to deface them.

Spaghetti and meatballs for dinner; to bed at 10:30.

My New Year’s resolutions are essentially the same as last years—to eat better, dress better, and to read and write more. I also want to improve my French.

§ **January 2.** Jimmy brought a unicycle to work, which he spent the morning trying to teach me how to ride. Just as I thought I was getting the hang of it, I lost my balance and reached out to grab Connie’s desk for support, knocking over her lava lamp. Now there’s a stain on the carpet under her chair. If she were here, she would be angry, but I haven’t seen her in over three months. When I asked Diane where Connie was she said she wasn’t allowed to talk about it.

I took the 4:00 bus home; the window next to my seat was covered with what I presumed to be pomade. I looked around for another seat but all the windows were covered with pomade.

At University Ave., a man who resembled the Unabomber boarded and took the seat next to me. He wore a hooded acrylic sweatshirt and aviator-style sunglasses, and smelled overwhelmingly of cheap deodorant (the way I imagine the real Unabomber does). I opened a window, and lamented how often it is I am forced to open a window when riding the bus.

How unpleasant public transportation is, but it is often better than driving. Of course, if I didn’t have to work for a living, I might instead stay home all day and never have to mingle with Unabombers.

§ **January 3.** In the middle of the night I got up for a drink of water. As I entered the kitchen, I saw the word “child” flashing eerily in the darkness from the microwave oven. Later at the office, I typed a letter to the device’s manufacturer for an explanation.

§ **January 4.** This evening Lucie and I walked down the street to see *Glengarry Glen Ross*. We enjoyed the play, but we didn't like our balcony seats because it was too difficult to hear the dialogue. Also, the gentleman behind me kept kicking my seat, as is always the case at the theatre. Perhaps one should sit in the back row with a hearing aid.

§ **January 7.** Another dull Sunday at the library. I had imagined something different when I decided to become a librarian; I pictured myself behind an antique oak desk discussing fine bindings and incunabula with visiting professors of medieval literature. At closing time, the insufferable Mr. Fanshawe kept us waiting as usual, fussing with his Hotmail account. He always waits until 5:01 to click "Print", except he clicks it rapidly dozens of times, causing the computer to have a fit. After we finally ushered him out the door, I noticed he had had seventeen copies of Netscape running simultaneously.

To my chagrin, I saw Mr. Fanshawe again when I went to pick up Lucie from the studio. Propriety forced my acknowledgement of him. He tried to introduce me to a young male friend, but I mumbled something about being late. Lucie and I avoided him by sneaking out a side door.

When we got home we ordered a pizza pie and enjoyed an episode of "Jeeves and Wooster" I had brought home from the library. During our meal, Mr. Darcy came into the room dragging a heavy blanket behind him. Lucie and I died laughing; I scrambled for the camera but it was out of film and had no batteries besides. To bed at 11:00.

While lying in the darkness, Lucie engaged me in a game of invented candy bar names. Her funniest were Get Nuttys and the O'Banion Bitey. I tried to think of a clever one, but all I could come up with was a thick chocolate bar from Australia called G'Day. Perhaps we might sell the names to Nestlé—one could make a fortune!

§ **January 8.** I woke up feeling rather ill. While perusing the internet this morning, I chanced upon a list of phobias. Some of the phobias are incredible—vestiphobia, for example, which means the fear of clothing. Another curious one was geniophobia, or the fear of chins. Who on earth would be afraid of chins? The geniophobe's worst nightmare: answering the doorbell to behold Kirk Douglas and Dudley Dooright arm in arm. Wearing

King Tut masks. I have decided I suffer the following phobias: aulophobia, misophobia, ochlophobia, tomophobia, aichmophobia, and zemmiphobia.

After dinner, Lucie and I met Kenneth at a neighborhood café to sign piles of papers. We were early, so we played billiards, at which Lucie nearly beat me. We had to change the rules a bit, since the eight ball was missing. The bartender said people keep stealing them, but *why*?

We were awakened at 1:15 a.m. by the woman next door, who had decided something needed hammering at once. I put on my Japanese silk robe and knocked on her door.

“Top o’ the morning! I was wondering if you could delay your project until after sunrise.”

“You could *hear* that?” She seemed annoyed.

I didn’t understand the question. “Why, of course.”

“I didn’t think you could *hear* that.”

“I wouldn’t dream of disturbing you otherwise.”

“OK, I’m *sorry*,” she said with heavy sarcasm.

Later, I was awakened by the sounds of a frustrated drunkard in the alley. It was the red-haired man in the wheelchair, a familiar face in our neighborhood whom we call Red. Red was trying to open a bottle of beer by using a fence pole as an opener, to no avail. I watched as he tried a brick wall, then the door handle of a Mercedes, which set off its alarm. However, the trick worked and the bottle was opened, much to our mutual relief.

**§ January 9.** Ill again. I briefly contemplated calling in sick, but then decided against it because Diane is on vacation; a Diane-free office is an opportunity too good to ignore lightly; why, one could get a lot of reading done!

I spent my entire lunch hour at the post office waiting for someone to call out the number on a small slip of paper I held in my hand; it seemed to me, although I may be mistaken, that the postal workers were willfully doing their job as slowly as possible. When I finally returned to work, two men were busy chopping down the sycamore tree outside my office window. My colleagues said they had been told it was rotten; a heavy branch had fallen over the weekend and landed on a car. For the rest of the afternoon, I watched helplessly as the once lovely tree was reduced to a raw, oozing stump.

§ **January 10.** Walking down Geary St. this morning I observed a trail of colourful candies on the sidewalk, left by persons unknown for reasons unknown. The candies were spaced about six feet apart; I followed the trail for several blocks (several boxes' worth, I should think) until the trail ended at the door of Betsey Johnson's boutique—an imaginative way to attract starving customers although I have always held that they starve themselves on purpose.

§ **January 15.** While waiting for the bus this afternoon, something caught my eye in the dirt, which turned out to be an old marble. It was rather pretty and looked like one of the Jovian planets. I held it up to the sun and admired it, then tossed it into the bushes. Moments later, I regretted having thrown it away. I decided to look for it, pawing around in the wet bushes and disturbing the crease in my tweed trousers. Then the bus arrived, and I had to leave without my beloved marble.

§ **January 16.** While waiting for the bus this afternoon (which is all I seem to do lately), I ascertained the existence of a wet blanket on the sidewalk, neatly rolled up as if someone had left it behind when they boarded an earlier bus. I nudged it with my foot, and as I did so, an enormous insect fell out and landed on its back, its legs wriggling in the air hideously. I recoiled in horror, but then I felt sorry for the helpless creature. After helping it to its feet, it scurried away. To no avail, I looked once again for yesterday's marble.

I took the N to meet Lucie at the studio, then we walked all the way home (four miles!).

§ **January 17.** I almost called in sick this morning. Legs very sore, bed very nice. When I did manage to appear at the office, I was told someone had "hacked into our company's web site" and made it say, "ALL YUOR BASE ARE BELONG TO US" [sic]. Diane just about had a heart attack, while Mr. Jenkins was positively apoplectic. I don't know what the cryptic message means, but Jimmy and Peter were laughing uproariously about it downstairs. Ah, Youth!

After work I met Kenneth at his office to sign more mountains of documents. On the way down Castro Street I noted with a smirk the mannequins

in the shop windows have conspicuous bulges in their pants, purposefully arranged by savvy homosexual shop owners.

At 9:30, there was a knock at our door. It was the woman with the hammer. “Yeah, *hi*...I just wanted to ask you if you minded if I did some *hammering*.”

Every time we ride the lift together, she asks, “What floor?” I answer “6” and she says, “Oh, yeah, you’re my neighbor. What’s your *name* again?” I can’t remember her name, either, but at least I recognize her hatchet face when I see it.

§ **January 18.** Today at work a filthy, bearded gentleman stood below my office window bellowing, “Nobody tells me what to do! Nobody! Not even me! You don’t tell me what to do, he doesn’t tell me what to do, nobody, I mean, *nobody* tells me what to do,” &c. Before him was a shopping cart full of junk—bottles, old wood, coat hangers, his precious things. Presently he stopped shouting, then took a long dramatic swig from a bottle of something in a paper bag. He then flung the bag into the bushes and disappeared down the street, muttering.

Our sleep was disturbed around midnight by someone blowing repeatedly into a trombone and then laughing. At first, I could hear other people laughing, too, which seemed to encourage whoever was doing the blowing. But as the night wore on and the the joke grew old, the laughing diminished and eventually ceased altogether.

§ **January 20.** Lucie had to work, so after accompanying her as far as Market St., I spent the rest of the morning wandering around North Beach, which, despite being absorbed by Chinatown, still retains a little of its historical Italian charm. On the way home I took my lunch at an obscure Powell St. diner. The waitress greeted me and handed me a manila folder filled with papers, and I thought, “What are these documents?” but it turned out to be the menu.

As I finished my meal, some cable car operators came in to eat. One gentleman ordered his burger “cremated”—he kept repeating it to the Oriental waitress, who seemed not to understand, until his colleague clarified, “He wants it *burnt*.” The waitress replied, “Yeah, I know burnt,” then shouted to the cook, “One hamburger—burnt.” The second gentleman then said, af-

ter a well-timed pause, “I don’t want mine burnt. I want mine *kickin’ and screamin’*.”

On the way home I noticed someone had altered the signs on Bush Street to read “Puppet Street”. I was disappointed when I realised that what I at first thought was a charming Dada joke was in fact a clumsy jab at our President.

At 10:00 Lucie and I went to a low drinking establishment to meet Winston, who wanted to see The Leaving Trains (whom I dimly recalled from my youth). We were early, so we amused ourselves by observing what the young hipsters were wearing. I felt conspicuous in my ’40s-era wool suit. Winston arrived at midnight; we spoke with him about music until 2:00, when it was announced that The Leaving Trains had broken up yesterday and canceled the remainder of their tour.

Winston had brought along his sidekick Art (the two do a pirate-themed show on a college radio station), who is perhaps the most bashful person I have ever met. He sat alone all evening, and when we left the bar, Art followed a block behind us, smoking a cigarette and staring at his feet. Winston assured us Art wasn’t trying to be rude, that’s just his way. What’s funny is how animated Art is when he and Winston are on the radio together.

§ **January 21.** Lucie and I took our breakfast at a nearby diner, this one the greasiest of the greasy spoons. As we ate, Lucie told me a story about how when she was a small child she thought the phrase “to pull the wool over one’s eyes” was a euphemism for sexual intercourse. She cited a movie in which, regarding a woman’s affair, her friend remarked, “He pulled the wool over her eyes.” We then began to think up other possible euphemisms, such as, “He took her to the cleaners.”

After breakfast we bumped into Nico, who had a young Thai boyfriend with him. Nico told us he’s been taking acrobat classes. At first I thought he meant Acrobat, as in the Adobe Acrobat program we have to use at the office, but it turns out he’s studying to be an acrobat at the San Francisco School of Circus Arts. I noticed with discomfort that Nico has a decidedly different jaw, recalling his addiction to plastic surgery. I withheld my opinion but am privately appalled.

§ **January 22.** Spent an inordinate sum of cash today on several slim volumes of decadent poetry, a book of Brassai photographs and Kessel’s

hefty tome on Kisling.

Upon entering our building this evening, I encountered our neighbor Vinnie in the lobby, who was blocking the way. He was struggling to zip up his trousers.

“Good evening, Vincent. How are you?”

Vincent looked up at me slowly, without recognizing me; he reeked of plonk. “Woof! God *damn* it...I’m pretty fucked up. I’m pretty fucked up.” He gave a shrill whistle to indicate the degree of his intoxication, slapping me on the back as I squeezed by him; he held my head in the crook of his arm and began to sing momentarily, but stopped when I escaped his grip and continued toward the lift. *Mon dieu*, that armpit! As I reached the lobby I could hear him bellowing once again, as if in defiance, “God damn I’m fucked up!”

§ **January 23.** The bench at the bus station was full, so I waited near the curb while reading Zola’s *The Fortune of the Rougons*. I soon became conscious of the little Oriental woman who always shoves her way into the bus ahead of everyone else, then takes forever to pay with a handful of pennies and nickels while the other passengers wait patiently with their tickets in hand. She was standing to my right, ready to spring to action as soon as the bus appeared. I resolved to board ahead of her this time, but when the bus arrived, I was too distracted by my book to notice and she was the first one aboard again.

After lunch, I was walking into the corner store when I witnessed a wrecked dune buggy pull up, from which climbed an unwashed hippie. He had an unworldly, shipwrecked appearance, due in part to his costume of tattered paisley pyjamas and bare feet.

“Can you spare \$1.50?” he pleaded.

“No.”

As I shopped for a bottle of Campari, I could hear the hippie haggling with the grocer. When I approached the counter, the hippie repeated, “Are you sure you can’t spare \$1.75?”

“Yes.”

After the hippie left, I observed a six-pack of Coors he had left behind on the counter.



§ **January 25.** A tempest blew in at lunch, accompanied by thunder, lightning, and hail. Jean-Luc gave Lucie the keys to the apartment today, so after work we raced over. We've a mortgage! I shuddered with delight.

After nodding to the doorman, we took the lift to the 8th floor. The excitement mounted as I struggled to figure out the door locks, then ceremoniously carried Lucie over the threshold.

A '30s-era brochure calls our new building, "an imposing 22-story Class A structure of 400 rooms, one of the newest and tallest in the West." Built in 1930, it began as a grand apartment hotel; in 1960, they became California's first condominiums.

Our "bohemian pad" consists of a large living room, a sleeping alcove, a kitchenette-dinette, a dressing room and bath, about 566 square feet total. We've a view through three large windows of the downtown skyline, the Tenderloin, SOMA, and in the distance, Potrero Hill and the bay. There is a deck on the 16th floor and parking in the basement (our names are on the three-year waiting list).

The apartment has seen better days. The carpet is stained as if a keg of tea had exploded all over it, the kitchen cabinets and appliances are wrecked, some hideous "track" lighting and a "country-style" ceiling fan need to be removed, and various other things need to be taken care of, but it's not so bad that one would call it a "fixer-upper".

Lucie and I spent two hours rummaging through the old man's things, which we purchased with the apartment. He was a religious man; he kept a well-thumbed Bible next to his bed, and the walls were adorned with several crucifixes. Dozens of butterfly ornaments adorned the ceiling and walls. A desk was stuffed with old correspondence, theatre programs, ticket stubs, and back issues of *Playbill*. A bookcase contained chiefly Reader's Digest condensed books, novels by Peter Benchley and Dick Francis, and a Chuck Yeager biography. Next to these was a collection of thrift store bric-a-brac and cheap chinoiserie. A neat closet contained five well-worn hats, six pairs of cowboy boots, and ten shirts. Scattered throughout the apartment we found nine scissors; however, I could find not a single screwdriver, needed to remove the heavy curtains over the windows and sleeping alcove.

We discarded what we couldn't save for charity—spoiled food, toiletries, old newspapers. It was sad work. I found it particularly melancholy to touch his more personal belongings, such as his reading glasses, which were sitting on top of a book called *Give Us This Day: A Devotional Guide to*

*Daily Living.* Lucie found his wallet on a table, which had been emptied by someone (the authorities?).

I opened the windows to bring in some fresh air, and looked down eight floors to the pavement where Thomas Hill and his dog's lives ended.

§ **January 28.** It was a lazy day at the library, although I did have a few real reference questions (as opposed to the usual, "How late are you open?" and "Do you have [insert title of whatever Oprah is telling everyone to read this week here]?") One woman called and asked in a sultry voice what Münchhausen's Syndrome was, how to spell it, &c. An ill-dressed gentleman wanted a list of the four hundred richest men in America. Later, I got a call from a teenaged boy.

"Is this the reference desk?" I thought his tone a bit patronizing.

"Yes," I replied cautiously, "what can I do for you?"

"What time does the Superbowl come on TV?"

"Let me check...please hold the line." While I was waiting for the television schedule to download on the computer, I joked, "The Superbowl...that's basketball, right?"

"Football," he replied, irritably.

"Here we are, it says here 6:35."

"6:35? That's impossible!" he snapped.

"What makes you say that?"

"Is the other lady there?"

"No, there's just me."

"Can I speak to someone else?" he demanded, impatiently.

"No."

"6:35, is that 'West Coast' time?"

"I don't know," I lied. "It doesn't say. But I can try to find out for you if you'd wait just a moment."

"Are you sure the normal lady isn't there?"

"I do not know of which lady you speak."

"The nice Italian lady."

"No."

“What about the librarian?” he interrupted.

“I’m the librarian.”

“You don’t sound like you know what you’re doing,” he bleated.

“Neither do you,” I barked, and hung up the receiver.

While driving across the Golden Gate Bridge on the way home, a white miniature van passed me, from which a little Hispanic boy shouted out the window at me, “WAAAAZZZZUUUUUP!” while making a satanic symbol with his hand. Despite finding it ill-mannered, I did have to stifle a chuckle.

§ **January 29.** I woke up at 6:30 pale, weak, sneezing and with a runny nose. I sent Diane an e-mail saying I was taking a sick day. Since I had parked downtown and had to move the car by 7:00, Lucie accompanied me as I drove all over the city trying to find a spot, which is near impossible on a weekday morning. After about twenty minutes I finally did find a spot west of Divisadero. We took an unbelievably packed 38 bus home, and I crawled back into bed with a groan.

We got up at 9:30 and spent the rest of the day picking up paint and carpet samples and running errands. So much for my cold!

§ **January 30.** Although still ill, I was animated enough to drive with Lucie to the Home Depot Expo in the East Bay, then to two different Home Depots and the monstrous Ikea, searching for kitchen cabinets that weren’t hideous or over-priced. I was heavily sedated with cold medicine and Lucie’s feet were killing her, so we were relieved when we finally got home at 8:00.

§ **February 1.** I left work at 4:00 and rushed to our new apartment where I found the contractors, contracting. To my horror, I noticed the bathroom had been painted baby-aspirin pink instead of white. Nobody spoke English, so when I got back to the old apartment I called Fernando who assured me, to my relief, that the pink was just a primer.

§ **February 2.** What a dreadful night! I couldn’t fall asleep because I kept worrying about the work being done to our new apartment. Sometime after midnight a bum in the alley started wailing, *tutto forza*, “The Star-Spangled Banner”. I inserted my ear plugs but could still hear the crescendos.

I did eventually fall asleep, but then had every anxiety dream; getting in trouble at work, Lucie leaving me, being naked in a classroom, &c. Monty woke me up with cat gymnastics at 6:14, and the alarm went off one minute later. When I got up, my back hurt, as if I had slept in the gutter.

On the way home from work, I bumped into Barbara Douthwaite, with whom I used to work at the EPA.

“Good afternoon!”

“Oh, Julian. Hi. How are you?”

“Quite well, thanks. How are you? Are you still at the EPA?”

“Yes.”

I didn’t have anything else to say, but then remembered we went to the same dentist. “I say, I’m still seeing Dr. Wu. You know, he’s a really fine dentist. I’m so glad you recommended him to me.”

“I don’t know a Dr. Wu,” she snapped.

“Yes you do. You recommended him to me, remember?”

“I’ve been seeing Dr. Schwartz for twelve years.”

“Ahem, I could have sworn you told me about Dr. Wu. Well, it was nice to see you again!”

“You, too. Buh-bye.”

“Ta ta.”

I felt like an ignoramus, but then I started thinking. I am almost positive I recall a dialog during which she had told me all about her root canal. She said her dentist’s name was Dr. Wu; she praised him highly. I had written the name down and called him a few weeks after that. Why would she pretend not to know him now? I must be going daft.

**§ February 3.** After work Lucie and I went to our new apartment to see how things were progressing. Fernando wasn’t finished, but said he could come back tomorrow even though he normally doesn’t work on Sundays. He still needs to do the kitchen floor and finish painting.

**§ February 4.** The work on the apartment is finally completed. The kitchen looks great (although the hot and cold water taps are reversed), the paint looks great, everything looks splendid. Lucie and I brought over a few

boxes then removed to the roof deck, admiring our new view and feeling very pleased with ourselves.

§ **February 6.** The carpet installers came and went. The new carpet is as magnificent as carpet can be (we got the best they had), but the installers left over a dozen small, black spots in various places, as well as a few dark smudges on our freshly painted walls. I called Pioneer Carpets to complain, and they agreed to send someone over to take a look.

§ **February 7.** Diane stuck her head in my office today and said, “Eww, it smells like *socks* in here!”

“*Get...out!*” I hissed with a wave of my hand, but in a playful way, so she wouldn’t think I loathed her (she is my supervisor, after all).

“You might not notice it because you’re a guy, but it does smell like a locker room in here. You should leave this door open.”

My office does *not* smell like a locker room. It doesn’t smell like anything except fresh air, because I always have my windows open. Diane just can’t stand it that I have an office now, especially one that’s superior to hers.

§ **February 8.** The gentleman from Pioneer Carpets came out and agreed that the spots were indeed black. He said he would have someone call us about having the spots removed.

§ **February 9.** Pouring rain and other weather-related excitement. While watching hail bounce off the skylight, I saw Diane emerge from Mr. Jenkins’ office, having obviously been crying.

Lucie and I had dinner with Guillaume at the Pinecrest, then we took some boxes over to the apartment.

To bed at 11:00, exhausted. Around midnight it began to hail again. Lucie and I watched a couple of party girls in the parking lot below run squealing for shelter.

§ **February 12.** Lucie and I were driving down Geary Street this morning when we saw a grinning, topless prostitute walking down the middle of the street, waving at cars. She (not a man in a dress this time) was about

twenty, Hispanic, and rather skeletal; I could count each of her ribs. It was quite a surprising thing to see in broad daylight, so far from Polk Street.

At lunch, I spent forty-five minutes at the Albany post office just to mail a package to the Netherlands. The place was packed, and everyone was standing around making a show out of looking at their watches, sighing loudly, and complaining about how long they've been waiting, which post offices are the slowest, &c. Afterwards I stopped by Walgreens for lip balm and shoe polish, which took fifteen minutes even though the store was nearly empty and I was only second in line at the register. The woman in front of me had some sort of a problem with a pile of coupons or receipts spread before her upon the counter. Why does everything have to be such a damned ordeal?

On the bus home from work we passed Nigel's Imports on 6th Street, the sign for which says, "Nigel Import's," as if Import is Nigel's last name. Nigel Import's *what*? I could play the role of the Apostrophe Police, handing out "citations" to such grammatical scofflaws but what stops me is the overwhelming number of violations, not to mention how pathetic it would make me look. This sign is going to bug me every time I see it, but perhaps not as much as the traffic-cone orange Any Mountain warehouse next door, which just might be the second-ugliest building in the entire Bay Area, the ugliest, of course, being Lombardi Sports at 1600 Jackson Street in San Francisco.

§ **February 14.** The bowl of bread crumbs Lucie had left on the fire escape for the birds several months ago has become a sort of sick science experiment. The bowl's contents are now a revolting, black, bubbling mass.

At lunch I went to Animal Farm to get a new cat litter box, but when I got it home I realized it was too big. `jp align="left`

§ **February 15.** I left work early at 2:00 to exchange the litter box and to help Lucie deal with the carpet cleaners. Having expected a crew of six with a variety of powerful spot-removing machines, I was surprised when a goateed young man in an Armani suit arrived carrying a plastic squirt bottle and a small white towel.

He squirted whatever was in the bottle onto the spots, then rubbed them vigorously with the towel, the way Maria at Pioneer Carpets specifically said not to.

I'm really a jazz musician...I only remove spots as a hobby," the young man confided, after looking us over and deciding we were probably jazz-friendly.

§ **February 16.** Today I saw a diminutive car made out of Samsonite, like those suitcases gorillas used to try to destroy on television. Passers-by were touching it and knocking on it—no one could believe it was a plastic car.

§ **February 17.** On the way to work we stopped by the apartment to drop off more boxes. At the corner of O'Farrell and Leavenworth we saw an inebriated, toothless man pour beer all over the head of an angry, troll-like woman. The woman then chased the man down Leavenworth, shaking her fists and cackling. Substitute a wooden cup for the plastic one, and it could have been a scene from the Dark Ages.

§ **February 18.** At 2:15 a.m. we were awakened by the sounds of drunken behavior in the alley below. I looked out the window and beheld three wasted frat guys. They were dressed formally, although one was missing his jacket, and drinking something out of little white plastic bottles. They were shouting and hooting to their friend who was on the roof deck on the El Cortez.

I called the authorities, but the frat guys ran inside before the police could arrive. They reappeared later on the roof deck, hurling little plastic bottles, urinating, belching, and singing. I called the hotel manager, who denied everything, so I called the police again. The din continued until 4:00.

We slept until 10:00, then spent the morning moving more stuff to the new apartment. We're moving all the breakable things ourselves, such as dishes and *objets d'art*. On the way there, a flamboyant individual approached Lucie and said in a high-pitched voice, "Ooh, girl! You look just like a little *Dutch* girl! Look at you, just *look* at you! You're a little *Dutch* girl," &c. I smiled nervously and quickly ushered Lucie into our building.

After luncheon at the Olympic Diner, we drove down to Palo Alto to see *Paramount on Parade* (1930) and *Glorifying the American Girl* (1929). On the way there, Lucie and I saw an eagle sitting on the guard rail by the side of 280.

After the movies, we were hungry, so we went to a chain restaurant called World Wrapps for a quick bite to eat before the long drive home. The guy behind the counter spoke little English, so ordering was a challenge. I wanted a smoothie, but he informed me in language I could just understand, “No smoothie tonight.” After we ordered our food and sat down at a greasy table, Lucie was told by a different non-speaker of English, “No beans.” Because of the frustrating language barrier, Lucie finally told him to bring her anything, *no cuido*.

When the “wrapps” came, they were cold in the middle, the plates were dirty, and the forks were bent. It was so awful we were laughing. We wolfed down half of our meal, then literally *ran* out the door, exhausted and eager to get home. I suppose I could have demanded our money back, but I didn’t have the energy or patience. Sometimes it’s easier to lower one’s standards than to defend them. When we got home there was a miraculous parking spot right in front of our building. We parked, then with great suspicion read each sign carefully; one said “STREET CLEANING MWF 12:01 A.M. to 4:00 A.M.” The “12:01” is presumably for those who don’t know the difference between a.m. and p.m. Tomorrow was a holiday, what was it, President’s Day? Is President’s Day a *real* holiday? Is there street cleaning on holidays? With so many uncertainties, we decided to park in our usual spot, ten blocks away beyond Van Ness.

§ **February 21.** We got up at 7:00 to prepare for the movers. While getting dressed, I suddenly remembered I had parked in a tow-away zone (street cleaning on Wednesdays from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.). I took the 38 bus to our car, which was still there, an almost illegible \$30 ticket plastered to the wet windshield.

By the time I returned, the movers were already busy moving boxes into the hall. Fernando had brought a different assistant this time, a friendly but rather dim-witted punk rocker named Victor who had a huge scar on his neck which stretched ear-to-ear. At one point, Victor and I were standing next to the van and he asked me, “So you are moving, yes?” I couldn’t place his accent, which may have been Russian.

The question surprised me. “Uhh, yes. Where’s the German gentleman?”

“Frank? He’s in Tahoe.”

As we spoke, the drizzle turned into rain. “Tahoe, eh? I’ll bet he’s



enjoying himself,” referring to the fact that Tahoe was expecting heavy snow today.

Yes, I am sure, although I think it will perhaps snow there,” he replied, staring at the sky with an expression of great worry, apparently unaware that that Tahoe was a popular *skiing* destination.

The movers finished at 3:00, and as soon as they left Lucie and I commenced to unpack.

§ **February 22.** We slept until 11:00. Lucie and I spent the day putting things away, hanging pictures, shelving books, &c. while listening to an Edith Piaf album. At 5:00 we took the 19 bus to Union Street to pay for a lovely vitrine for the bathroom. Afterwards, we took the 41 bus to North Beach to stock up on bread, cheese, and pasta. It started raining, so we bought a \$3 umbrella in Chinatown. Lucie took the opportunity to ask the Chinese proprietess questions about some decorative umbrellas; Lucie had spoken of using one as a light shade for the closet. The woman seemed irritable, and gave short answers to all Lucie’s questions. When asked if she had a larger version of a particular paper lantern, the woman responded with a long, resplendent belch, which we interpreted as a definitive *no*.

§ **February 24.** Last night I had horrid dreams, probably because of my new terrible pillow, which is spongy and too high. I miss my old pillow, which we threw away when we moved because it was falling apart.

Guillaume went to work with us because he wanted Lucie to teach him how to do some things on INNOPAC—he has a job interview Monday at Hayward Public Library.

After dinner Lucie and I watched *Bachelor Apartment* and *Night Nurse*, both from 1931.

§ **February 25.** Lucie did another open house for Jean-Luc at awful 900 Bush Street. She said he had slipped on the wet terrazzo steps in front of his house and had cut his head. When he picked Lucie up, he was holding a bloody towel to his head. She told him he should go to the hospital, but he said he had another open house to do first.

At 6:30 we went up to the roof deck to watch the International Space Station, which zipped across the sky right when they said it would. I imagined

the astronauts on board, looking out the window and waving while sipping Tang martinis and listening to space age bachelor pad music.

§ **February 26.** Aaargh! Lucie and I will be in New Orleans when *Dames* and *Footlight Parade* are playing at the Stanford. It would have been a rare chance to see them on a big screen. There is no way we can not go to New Orleans now because we have already purchased our tickets.

I left work at 3:45 to meet Lucie in Mountain View. On the way there the odometer on the Nissan hit 100,000 miles, a moment I had anticipated but which I now found trivial.

On our way to Palo Alto we stopped at Mountain View Surplus where Lucie bought me a nice Navy pea coat—now we’re twins!

Most of the restaurants on University seem to serve student food, so we settled for cheeseburgers at an uninteresting diner, the “theme” of which had something to do with taxis. The bored, too-cool college student behind the counter screwed up our simple order, so the manager gave us a “free meal card” to use on our next visit. There wasn’t going to be a next visit, but I guess I don’t mind eating there once more as long as it’s free.

While we were eating, a stoned hippie came in doing a goofy dance while waving an ugly paisley duffel bag in the air. He played Patsy Cline’s “Crazy” on the jukebox three times in a row before the manager made him leave.

After dinner we saw *Broadway Melody* and *Hollywood Revue of 1929*. I recorded the better musical numbers on minidisc. As we left the theater, we noticed two bums lying in the back row, one in an enormous Gortex coat and the other clutching an empty bag of Doritos. Did they pay the full \$8.00 admission price or were they let in for free? Neither seems plausible.

§ **March 2.** *Quel coincidence!* Lucie and I are both reading biographies of men named Harry Crosby; I’m reading Gary Giddins’ new book on Bing (*né* Harry Lillis Crosby), while Lucie is reading about the Harry Crosby of Black Sun Press fame.

On the radio there was a news item about foot and mouth disease in Britain, except the reporter kept referring to it as “foot in mouth” disease.

When I got home from work there were several packages addressed to me. Ahh, the thrill of the brown padded envelope!

§ **March 7.** At lunch I went to a couple of bookstores on Telegraph Ave. After emerging from Shakespeare & Co. with a first edition (no dust jacket) of Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* for \$6, I was startled by a wall of black high school students running wild through the streets, shaking their fists and shouting slogans and obscenities. Police closed several streets in the area after the mob looted the ill-named Athlete's Foot and beat a man unconscious. Later, I found out the students had been let out of school to attend an affirmative action rally on the UC campus. A political rally on a college campus is no place for high school students. That this was considered a good idea by school officials is one reason I dislike Berkeley so much. I can just imagine what the parents of these children will feel when they see all this on the news tonight.

Walking home down Post Street after work I saw a dead man. He was on the sidewalk covered with a yellow tarpaulin. A bystander told me he had collapsed just after leaving the gym across the street.

§ **March 9.** Lucie and I went to Circuit City after work to look at DVD players and ended up purchasing a 27" television set. We decided to wait on a DVD player, because the kinds of movies we like generally aren't on DVD yet.

Like most modern appliances, our new picture box is a massive, hideous, silver plastic rectangle, a monumental eyesore in our "shabby French chic" living room. As soon as we got it home (it almost didn't fit in the car), I hooked it up and we watched *Les nuits de la pleine lune* again, Lucie's favourite movie.

§ **March 10.** Lucie and I left the library early so we could make it to Palo Alto in time to see *Roman Scandals* (1933) and *We're Not Dressing* (1934). I didn't think I'd like Eddie Cantor, but he was hilarious in *Roman Scandals*; the chariot race had Lucie and I in hysterics. However, *We're Not Dressing* was a dud – Bing's scene with the dancing bear was particularly dumb.

On our way home we ate at Gold's Italian Dinners at 18th and Taraval because we liked its vintage neon sign and also because it was very late and there was little else open. The décor, which has remained unchanged since the joint (such an appropriate word here) opened in 1969, features two fiberglass replicas of classical sculptures, brass and clear plastic chandeliers, and various

nautical appurtenances, among which Lucie and I spotted four diminutive Santa Clauses, hidden there a dozen Christmases ago and forgotten. Several *mafiosi* sat at the bar, staring silently into their drinks.

Our waiter Tony had a vague, mobster-like quality about him; I could just imagine him upstairs in the manager's office, having a cheerful telephone conversation with his Aunt Maria while pistol whipping a busboy who had failed to steal the recipe for a marinara sauce from a rival *ristorante*.

After ordering, I excused myself. The restroom had the highest urinal I had ever seen; almost too high to use except by basketball players. Half the graffiti on the walls were in Italian, which I acknowledged as a good sign if one is looking for authentic Italian cooking. When I returned to the table, Lucie had a look of concern on her face.

"Taste this," she said, handing me her glass of water.

"It tastes like gin."

"It *is* gin."

We were too disturbed to say anything, so I let Lucie drink my water while I had a soda. Somehow we escaped with our lives, and were in bed by midnight.

§ **March 11.** On the way to the library I dropped Lucie off at the Vintage Fashion Expo, where she was hoping to find a coat.

While sitting behind the reference desk at the library I flipped through a copy of *Guinness World Records 2001*, laughing at all the dubious entries. The most whimsical records seem to be held by Americans and Brits – youngest supermarket consultant, most milk crates balanced on chin, most clothespins clipped on the face and neck, &c. The endurance records are largely held by Africans and Asians – longest time standing on one foot, longest time spent fasting in a Banyan tree. The trick must be to identify a record you think you can break, such as "most flapjacks eaten in ten minutes," then add your own twist to it, such as "most flapjacks eaten in ten minutes while free-falling from 20,000 feet." I wonder if there are any world records I could break? Perhaps most hours wasted sitting in front of one of these infernal machines...

Lucie was waiting for me at home after work, sporting a lovely '50s-era celery-green wool coat with mink collar and cuffs.

§ **March 12.** I met Lucie in Palo Alto at that crummy “taxi” diner so we could use the “free meal” card they gave us last time.

*Flying Down to Rio* (1933) was a disappointment, but the final ten minutes were agreeably absurd, an outrageous dance number featuring chorus girls dancing on the wings of biplanes. We sat in the balcony next to two trendy Lesbians who kept giggling and making noise with candy wrappers and plastic bags. After we moved downstairs we could still hear them. I found it hard to believe they could make so much noise and not be doing it intentionally.

Between movies an organist we recognized from Oakland’s Paramount Theater played selections from *42nd Street*, which had Lucie and I singing along under our breaths.

*42nd Street* on the big screen was delightful. It was interesting to see at which scenes the audience laughed; it made me look at those scenes in a different way and see humour where I hadn’t noticed it before. I have always wondered about the final scene in which Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler end the song by pulling down a sign from above which says “ASBESTOS.” What does it mean?

On the way home, we were pulled over because one of our headlights was out. I shewed the officer the replacement bulb I had just bought, which satisfied him, but he did give me a ticket for an expired registration. The registration doesn’t expire until April – the computer is obviously wrong. As soon as we got home I made an appointment at the DMV over the internet.

§ **March 14.** On the way to the bus station this morning, I encountered a man playing two flutes simultaneously. He played wildly, creating a whining, uncanny music. I had to cross the street to avoid his mindless melodies, which reminded me of the music of Chthulhu.

§ **March 18.** It was another tranquil day at the library. I had very few reference questions, being approached mostly by people who wanted their name added to the waiting list for the new Harry Potter book. A soccer mom wanted a book about back pain, and an old man wanted to know if we had a copy of Nabokov’s *The Defense*. Although I do enjoy helping people use the library, I am rarely asked anything challenging, or even interesting.

§ **March 19.** On the way to the car this morning, Lucie and I were followed for several blocks by an obviously lonely prostitute who liked Lucie's shoes. She kept saying things like, "Those shoes are f\*ckin' *awesome*, you know that? Where'd you *get* those?" Lucie was nice about it, but we were relieved when left her behind at Van Ness.

When I got to work, I booted up my computer and opened Outlook, then went downstairs to prepare my tea. When I returned to my desk, I made a nasty discovery. Outlook opens the topmost e-mail message in a preview window, which today unfortunately featured a particularly objectionable pornographic image. Our company gets inundated every day with tons of Korean spam. They installed a special program which is supposed to eliminate spam in general, but all the Korean smut still gets through.

I left work at 3:30 to meet Lucie in Palo Alto for more movies at the Stanford Theater. We were going to meet at the Rose & Duck Pub, but when we walked in, it was empty except for several British thugs who all turned around and stared at us. Our second choice was the Peninsula Fountain & Grill, which turned out to be more our style. It was a well-preserved old-timey diner but in the '30s mode, so there were none of those ubiquitous James Dean and Marilyn Monroe posters one typically sees at other diners. My only complaint is they have divided some of the booths into two by means of a big piece of wood, so now they're too narrow to sit in comfortably; the gentleman next to me kept wiggling around, which I felt on my side of the seat, which we shared.

We finished dining just in time for *Girl Crazy* (1932), which was definitely the worst film in the series (although still better than anything proffered by Hollywood today). Twenty minutes into the movie, who arrives late and sits directly behind us, kicking our seats and making lots of noise with plastic bags? Those terrible Lesbians we had to move away from last time! We changed seats again, but could still hear them speaking in their "out-door" voices and laughing at scenes which weren't funny. Halfway through the movie I had a sneezing fit which lasted several minutes – I had to remove to the lobby until it subsided.

§ **March 24.** I arrived in New Orleans alone at five o'clock. Lucie couldn't come because she is suffering from the *grippe*. From the airport I took a cab with a giant "praying hands" display in the back window to the Hilton Garden Inn, near the convention center. I tossed my suitcase into my room and flew to the French Quarter.

I was impressed by the distinctiveness of it all; if not for a frat guy sticking his bare, pink ass out of the window of a fluorescent green Humvee limousine with Mississippi license plates, I'd have thought I was somewhere in the Old World. Those ninety-six square blocks, however, stand in stark contrast to the ugliness of the rest of what I'd seen of the Big Easy, which may as well have been Shreveport.

I had dinner on the balcony of the Royal Café, where I had a bird's-eye view of the bacchanalia in the streets below which was intensifying at an alarming rate. I ordered the crawfish *etouffée*, which was satisfactory, except I didn't like the waiter. He kept hovering nearby, asking repeatedly if I liked everything, or if I wanted any "fresh ground pepper" (my pet peeve). When he brought my plate to the table, he set it down with a ridiculous flourish of his hand, crying, "Bon appetit!" Later, when I wanted more wine, he had disappeared.

When I returned to the hotel at 11:00, I was too excitable to sleep, so I turned on the picture box. On "Jerry Springer" there was an overweight man who had a fetish for comestibles. His obese prostitute girlfriend devoured flapjacks off his body (their nakedness was digitally obscured), then they both took a bath in a tub filled with creamed corn. Another guest preferred to vomit upon his lover, which the producers had the common decency not to shew directly. It was appalling, but I couldn't take my eyes off the screen.

I called Lucie (who was two hours earlier than I) and said, "Hi it's me call me back (504) 525-0044 room 632," *click*. I did that because the last time I called her from a Marriott in Philadelphia, we spoke for an hour and I was charged \$77.

After we hung up, I looked around my room for the first time, and was made ill by the nauseating décor, which somehow managed to incorporate every colour known to man (as well as some which are not).

§ **March 25.** After a mind-numbing day at the convention center, I rushed back to the hotel to change, then spent the evening exploring the Vieux Carré. I had dinner at the Napoleon House, said to have been built for Napoleon in the 1820s. A reviewer had written of the restaurant, "With classical music providing a genteel background, Napoleon House sports a dark, quiet and comfortable ambiance, making it a favorite hangout for bohemian and eclectic types." The aforementioned "classical music" was the soundtrack to *Chariots of Fire*; the "dark ambiance" was due to the almost

complete lack of light save for two dim, orange light bulbs; the “bohemian and eclectic types” consisted of a family of paunchy tourists from Wisconsin (I’m guessing Wisconsin because of two of them were wearing knee-length Green Bay Packers jerseys and one had a “cheese head” baseball cap) and a frail, leathery prostitute. Still, I did like the place very much.

After dinner, I walked all the way up Chartres Street to Esplanade, then back on Royal, past Canal, then down to S. Peters back to my Technicolor hotel room. After talking to Lucie on the phone, I fell into a deep, air-conditioned slumber.

§ **March 26.** Today at the convention center I saw Dennis Fung, who was a witness for the prosecution in O.J.’s murder trial (the one who said, “I’m not sure this is the same glove.”) He was Lucie’s lab partner one semester at Cal State Long Beach. I briefly thought about introducing myself, “Hi, you were my wife’s lab partner once. By the way, I saw you on the picture box...” I wonder what a criminalist for the LAPD is doing at a cancer research conference?

§ **March 27.** I forgot to bring a camera, so I bought a disposable one at a convenience store on Canal. I sneaked away from the convention center at 2:30, then walked over to St. Charles to take the streetcar to the Garden District. Since Anne Rice and Trent Reznor live there, maybe it’s an interesting neighborhood. After three full streetcars passed without stopping, I decided to walk. I saw some melodious street names: Melpomene, Terpsichore, Polymnia, Euterpe, Erato. How I would love to live on Erato Street!

I continued down St. Charles to 4th, where I saw a neo-Gothic McDonald’s with *black* arches. I’ll bet that’s where Anne Rice eats. I turned left into the Garden District, wandering down each street at a leisurely pace and snapping the occasional photo. I did see some of the “decayed elegance” I had read about, in the form of crumbling, old Italianate and Greek Revival mansions. However, to my dismay, many of the older houses had been “remodeled” (rather than *restored*), complete with aluminum double-paned storm windows, vinyl siding, and wide concrete driveways with SUV’s parked in them. The no longer looked historic, merely new.

I went into a little mall on Prytania which had a shop in it called The Anne Rice Collection. Two wide-eyed Goth kids were talking to an older



blasé Goth girl behind the counter, whom I overheard saying, “No, she comes in here all the time,” and then, “Yeah, it’s pretty great working here.” I explored the tiny shop, which was mostly filled with ornate dolls, but also on display were devilish novelties such as Memnoch the Devil coffee mugs, Lestat cologne in collectible wolf bottles, vampiric tote bags, t-shirts with Anne Rice’s face on them, and a computer monitor with a note taped to it which said Rice had used it to write one of her novels, marked “SOLD”.

I walked down Magazine back to the hotel, peering into the windows of various antique and vintage clothing stores which had closed at 5:00; I would try to return tomorrow, if possible. By the time I reached Jackson St. it was getting dark; the neighborhood was assuming a sinister character, so I hailed a cab. It was driven by a black man who was speaking Cajun French into his cell phone; his accent was so thick I could barely understand what he was saying. His speech surprised and delighted me; I had assumed Cajun French was spoken only in rural areas and I hadn’t expected to hear any in the city.

§ **March 28.** Upon settling the hotel bill, I was incensed by the fact that each two-second call I made to Lucie had cost me \$5.76. Why, that’s highway robbery!

The convention ended at noon. It was warm, so I changed out of my suit, then took a cab back to the Garden District. I discovered a beautiful, ancient cemetery, which was remarkable for its complete lack of graffiti. In fact, I realized that I had seen little or no graffiti since I left San Francisco. The antique shops on Magazine turned out to be less interesting than I had hoped, so I took another cab to the French Quarter. I had luncheon at a little diner on Royal St., then spent an hour in a used bookstore on Chartres, where I found a hardback first edition of *Kiki’s Paris: Artists and Lovers, 1900-1930* to replace our paperback copy.

My 5:00 flight on United was two hours late. While I was waiting, I overheard a little girl ask her father, “Dad, when are we going to *blast off*?” The flight home was turbulent and I felt feverish and claustrophobic; the couple behind me had two babies which shrieked in my ears (one in each ear) the entire way home.

§ **April 2.** Lucie and I were awakened at dawn by the amplified sounds of a shrieking baby. Someone in the building next door was operating a karaoke machine, holding its microphone in front of a baby’s mouth. The

reverberation effect made the shrieking not unlike that of guitar feedback. One must really be mad to behave this way at such an obscene hour; I am afraid to approach this person.

§ **April 3.** At noon I went to the druggist's to pick up my photographs of New Orleans. Upon opening the envelope I discovered not my own black and white documents of antebellum architecture but someone else's crude snapshots; one of a swimming pool with a blue tarpaulin over it, another of a hideous baby, and another of a sunburned gentleman wearing a sleeveless t-shirt emblazoned with the phrase "XXL CAJONES". I went back into the store and had to wait in line to complain. The girl behind the counter filled out a form (misspelling my name, address, and phone number which I was obliged to correct), and I left empty-handed.

§ **April 7.** Tonight was the Art Deco Society's Platinum Ball. We paid \$100 for the tickets months ago, but on this night we were too languorous to budge from the divan. Also, I can't forget what happened at last year's fête, at which I was sorely tempted to bludgeon an insolent fellow who had it coming to him. Instead, we stayed home and watched *Gervaise* (Clément, 1956), a truncated but beautiful adaptation of Zola's *L'Assommoir*. Its subtitles were ancient and difficult to read, thus the film became an impromptu lesson in the French language.

§ **April 8.** The karaoke madman in the next building practiced his "routine" all evening; his caterwauling surpasses in unpleasantness that of an enraged sea lion. I went next door and waited in front of his building with keys in hand; when one the tenants emerged, I pretended that I had just taken my keys out and was about to open the front door, so they held it for me, assuming I lived there. I went upstairs to the sixth floor until I reached a door which concealed muffled wailing, and knocked. The cacophony continued, so I began to pound violently. Presently, a middle-aged Oriental man in undergarments opened the door.

"How do you do? Would you please stop operating that infernal machine or at the very least shut your window? Your clumsy attempts at music is sheer torture to my poor, sensitive ears." I clutched my ears and winced.

He seemed not to speak English, but my countenance in this particular context was sufficient to make clear to him the purpose of my visit. After

I returned to our apartment, however, the wailing continued with renewed vigour.

Lucie was quite miffed. "I'm going over there myself!" she cried.

"But you'll have to infiltrate the premises, which is not easy."

"I'll manage," she said, as she slammed the door behind her.

Minutes later, the wailing stopped, and Lucie returned, triumphant.

"What did you do to him?"

"I threatened to report him to the authorities. As soon as I said 'authorities', his English suddenly improved. He said it was the only time he could practice singing because he performs on Friday nights with friends."

*Performs.* I could scarcely believe anyone would regard such noise as performance.

§ **April 25.** Weeks later, Walgreens still has no inkling where my New Orleans photographs are. I was given the number of a processing facility in Boston which I have phoned several times, to no avail. When I called again today, a gentleman asked defensively if I had received my "free film and processing," which I had not. I asked him to which address it had been sent, and he told me my address but without the apartment number.

§ **April 26.** The karaoke madman serenaded us through his windows, thrown open wide for the benefit of all. Others were with him, taking their turn along with the baby, who was given frequent opportunities to shatter nearby wine glasses. When the insanity had not subsided by 10:00, I grabbed an egg from the icebox, opened the window, and hurled it at his window with a precision which would have impressed Archimedes. The egg smashed into my intended target with a loud *bang*. I hastily drew the curtains, then peeked outside. The singing had stopped, and someone was swearing in Chinese into the karaoke machine, causing its speakers to howl violently. Lucie and I congratulated each other. Moments later, the singing resumed and continued *tutto forza* until 11:47.

§ **April 27.** In the light of day, I was able to assess the damage from last night's air strike. I had scored a perfect bull's-eye; yolk had splattered all over the window, then had dripped all over the window sill and into an interior box fan.

§ **April 30.** As I arrived at the office this morning, I perceived some colorful balloons by the curb, tied together with pink ribbon. Peeking out from behind the balloons was a cute kitten—it resembled a scene from a Hallmark card. I assumed it was a neighbor’s kitten, but I worried about it all day in my cubicle; when I left at 5:00 it was gone, and the balloons lay deflated in the gutter.

Lucie came home from work fuming, complaining that today Ursula had told her, snidely, “You look like you’re on your way to a *cocktail* party.” It was the third time in as many days someone at work had commented on her attire in a way which suggested Lucie overdresses or dresses inappropriately for work.

I asked Lucie what Ursula was wearing at the time, and she replied, “Ghastly purple sweatpants and an oversized polo shirt with marshmallow trainers.”

“You should go to work dressed exactly like her someday,” I teased, unsure of exactly what this would accomplish. Of course, one has no idea where one could find such apparel.

§ **May 1.** After work, Lucie and I went to the Legion of Honor to see the “Spirit of Montmartre” exhibition. We took a packed 38 bus (it’s *always* packed) out to 33rd, then walked up the hill, talking and holding hands. Before we went inside, we paused to admire an enormous cargo ship entering the bay, beyond which the distant waves were smashing against the headlands. Beyond the Farallones to the west, the fuzzy, pink sun was slowly sinking into the ocean. The gloaming was lovely and we were in high spirits.

The exhibition consisted of paintings, drawings, posters, books and ephemera, all pleasing. I would have wanted to purchase the catalog, but it was too expensive and printed on poor-quality paper. At seven o’clock we were ushered into the theater for lectures, music, and other entertainment. First (after fifteen minutes of preliminary speeches), Gwendolyn Mok performed Satie, Ravel, and Poulenc on the piano, with intelligent and lively commentary between each piece. Next, Barnaby Conrad gave a slide lecture about his book on the history of absinthe. Had I known he was going to be there, I would have brought our copy of his book for him to sign.

Maurice Jonas, a retired Stanford professor of French literature, played recordings of cabaret songs by Yvette Guilbert and Aristide Bruant and made remarks about each. This was followed by Les Bons Bons performing the

*can-can* to the music of Offenbach, who were a hoot. During the *can-can*, I overheard one of the three teenaged girls sitting behind us say, “But how can we *prove* we were here?” to which her friend replied, “She’ll believe us, she *always* believes us.”

Afterwards, we walked up Geary to Gaspare’s. I had the tortellini with meat sauce; Lucie had a salad and two meatballs. I love their jukebox, which has old-timey Italian records by Domenico Modugno and Aurelio Fierro.

§ **May 3.** This morning I killed two fat flies in my office. Flies are among the only creatures I will willingly kill; the others are cockroaches and mosquitoes. I am for some reason unable to muster any sympathy for them.

For lunch I went to Andronico’s for yogurt, honey, cheese, and bread—the kind of meal Tom Bombadil might eat. When Anton saw what I was eating he said, “What? No *Arnold* burger today?” Anton always comments on what everyone is eating. If it’s a sandwich from the corner store, he’ll say, “Mmm, I see you’ve been to the *corner store*.” Or, if it’s a burrito he’ll say, “Let me guess...*Picante*.” I never see him eating anything, only smoking.

Our tickets to Paris came in the mail today!

§ **May 6.** On the way down O’Farrell after parking the car this evening, I encountered a familiar homeless prostitute (the one who sleeps at the corner of O’Farrell and Jones) who, just as I was walking by, raised her skirt and sprayed urine toward me. I had to jump out of the way to avoid being splashed.

At the next light, I saw a man screaming at one of the pay phones near Larkin St. He threw the receiver down and stormed away, shouting obscenities and kicking parking meters. I never see people talking normally at pay phones; they’re always blowing their tops.

The karaoke guy still has not cleaned the egg off his window, nor have we heard him singing lately.

§ **May 7.** Lucie said that on her way home, it was warm, so she took off her sweater. As she did so, some construction workers whistled at her and yelled things like, “*Yeah, baby...take it off!*” That never happens when we’re together.

§ **May 8.** Another warm day; I decided to wear the sandals I bought in Montreal. To my dismay, the left sandal still makes a *whoosh* sound whenever I take a step. I poked some holes in the insole with an X-Acto knife, but the *whoosh* won't go away. I'll still wear them, albeit somewhat self-consciously.

Lucie has become friendly with the girl the nose ring at the café, Pamela. Lucie thinks the nose ring suits her, but I think it looks like a door knocker. This morning, Pamela was complaining that her boyfriend had moved out, leaving her to cough up the \$1,455 rent on her own. Lucie asked Pamela where she lived and she said 566 Geary. But this afternoon on my way home I noticed there is no such address.

§ **May 10.** Last night I was awakened by the sound of wild hammering. Lucie heard it, too, and we listened in the dark for several minutes, trying to figure out where it was coming from. Presently, I got dressed and went out into the hall, where the sound was louder. I followed the pounding downstairs to apartment 716, the unit diagonally below us, and knocked on the door. The hammering stopped for a moment, then resumed, so I knocked again, this time much more loudly. Once again, the hammering stopped, and I could hear the old man with the tubes in his nose talking to himself (or maybe that awful *woman* was with him, but it sounded like he was talking to himself). At last he shouted, "It's open!"

I opened the door a crack, and the old man approached, wearing an undershirt, boxers, and garters with tall, black socks. He squinted at me through thick bifocal glasses. He was holding a hammer.

"Good *morning* (it was after three o'clock). I live upstairs, are you by any chance *hammering* in there?" I asked, pointing at his hammer.

The old man glared at me for a few moments, then opened his mouth as if to say something, but only air wheezed out.

"I say, old man, we were wondering if you wouldn't mind postponing your carpentry until the morrow, that's a good fellow."

More air came out of his mouth, then he stammered, "W-w-w-wall right, I'll quit it."

"You will? That's *awfully* nice of you," I said, grasping his hand and shaking it. "On behalf of the sixth through eighth floors, I sure do *appreciate* it. I'm going to go try to get some shut-eye now; I suggest you do the same. You're not looking well."

As I walked back upstairs I could hear him wheezing and champing on his false teeth.

After weeks of wrong orders, credit slips, calls to the warehouse, arguments with managers, &c., our new taupe Dupioni silk drapery panels have arrived. Our new apartment is finally starting to feel like home.

§ **May 11.** Lucie has told me about a remarkable coincidence concerning Pamela, the girl with the door knocker in her nose. This morning, Pamela asked Lucie if we were acquainted with a friend of hers named Michael Haines who used to live in our building. Lucie said no. Later, on the train, a man with “mucilageous eyes” sat across from Lucie and struck up a conversation with her. Two seconds into the conversation he mentioned he used to live at the Hamilton. Lucie asked him if his name was Michael Haines and he said it was.

Lucie said the man seemed paranoid; he kept talking about how the media controls everything, mentioning the CIA several times. He was clutching a book called *The Mothman Prophecies*. I looked it up on the internet; its subject is a “mysterious feathery *garuda*” and its role in the collapse of a bridge in West Virginia in 1967. I didn’t know what a “garuda” was, so I looked it up; it’s a “supernatural half-man, half-bird vehicle or bearer of Vishnu.” I told Lucie to avoid Michael Haines if she sees him again.

§ **May 14.** When Lucie told Pamela about bumping into Michael Haines on the train, she seemed uninterested, which I found a bit odd. One must admit it was a remarkable coincidence, right?

§ **May 16.** I have a pillow problem. I hate the new pillow I bought when we moved; it’s too thin and insubstantial. After work, Lucie and I went to Bed, Bath & Beyond, where I picked out a larger, heavier pillow. The clerk in the pillow department was amiable, but he and Lucie argued over an air mattress; she disputed his claims about the product and the way he said people sleep, which she said sounded made-up. He tried to illustrate his claims by getting Lucie to lie on the mattress, but I think he just wanted to get a good look at her figure, if you ask me.

§ **May 17.** Traffic was quite heavy coming home; likewise, Lucie said the train was crowded with gum-smacking teenagers. At about nine o’clock

we found out why. We were disturbed by what we thought was a neighbor's stereo, but it turned out to be some group called The Dave Matthews Band playing at the new baseball park (we looked it up on the internet). I couldn't *believe* how loud it was; despite our living over two miles away (but we can still see the park from our window), I could make out some of the lyrics, "Oh, please...lover lay down." *Lie* down, I thought. I couldn't understand how the city could allow such a calamity. What are we supposed to do when we can't even hear ourselves *think* in our own apartment? I called the police to complain (as if that ever does any good), but I couldn't get through, presumably because everyone else had the same idea.

§ **May 19.** There was a story in the news about how the police department was deluged with complaints about last night's rock 'n' roll concert at Pac Bell Park; they reported "15 or 20 calls." I don't see how 15 or 20 calls constitutes a "deluge"; I reckon it was probably closer to two hundred.

On our way to work this morning, the freaks were out in droves; I thought Barnum & Bailey were in town. There was a disreputable-looking contortionist, a toothless old crone playing "On Top of Old Smokey" on a Casio, a burn victim shouting "Bullshit!" at passers-by, and groveling beggars at every turn. Then, on the MUNI platform, a young black man with a tall afro hairdo kept yelling things like, "I wanna get me some *pussy*," while clapping his hands to the beat in his head. When the N arrived, he got into the first car so Lucie and I got into the last.

It looks like the complaints about the concert helped; tonight's show is significantly quieter than last night's; I had to lean out the window to hear it at all.

§ **May 21.** I slept until 8:00, then went to Moscone Center to help Gerald at the ATS meeting. After asking two people who gave me bad directions, it took fifteen minutes to find out where the exhibitor registration window was. I didn't know where our booth was, either, but as soon as I entered the exhibit hall I spotted it in the back. I booted up the computers, set out pamphlets and pens, &c. Gerald showed shortly later with a large coffee stain on his sleeve.

It was a busy day. I spoke so much that my voice began to fail; I had to take frequent sips of orange juice, which I purchased from the Hofbrau next to the ladies' room.



Our booth was between those of Novartis and Ferraris Medical. Novartis manufactures Ritalin, I think. Their booth was decorated with marble columns atop of which rested marble bowling-sized balls (but without finger holes). Water was pumped through the columns and under the balls, causing them to “float” on the water and spin. People kept walking up and messing with the balls, and the Novartis representatives would tell them, “Don’t do that.” They were giving away rubber balls which had computer chips in them, so when one bounced them they lit up and made annoying electronic beeping sounds. The Novartis men were bouncing them constantly all day long; I made a show of putting my hands over my ears but they either didn’t see me or were ignoring me.

I don’t know what Ferraris does; they had set up a circus tent under which sat a Ferrari sports car. They had some sort of game wheel set up, like on the “Wheel of Fortune,” and people were spinning it all day long, *clackity, clackity, clackity*, but at the end of the day the Ferrari was still there.

It was interesting to observe the dress, manners, style, accents, &c of the attendees who had come from all corners of the world. Two chic women stopped by our booth; without reading their badges I correctly guessed they were from Paris. One young Oriental woman had a green and gold plaid wool suit from the ’60s, with a pink and red polyester blouse with psychedelic patterns on it. Her shoes were a dilapidated pair of hush puppies; it was something one might wear on *The Gong Show*. A Chilean man had the strangest belt I had ever seen; I almost asked him about it, but I didn’t want to inadvertently offend him.

§ **May 22.** I went to the convention again today; this time I walked around to look at all the booths. One company had a plate of Easy Cheese on a counter, into which they had attached an electronic probe. The probe was attached to a computer monitor which displayed a zigzag line and made beeping sounds. I asked what it was for and a man with Bible hair told me they were measuring the oxygen levels of the Easy Cheese. We exchanged pleasant banalities and then I moved on. Later, I saw another booth which had a plate of ham with probes sticking into it. I jokingly reached for the ham as if I were going to devour it, and a guy who looked just like Richard Dreyfus snapped, “Don’t even *think* about it!” I laughed nervously, then realized that I was probably the five-hundredth person to reach for the ham. I saw the chic French ladies again in the *La Lettre de pneumologie* booth.

At noon, Lucie and I luncheoned at the Café Bastille. They had just

opened their doors, but by the time our food arrived, there was a queue which stretched all the way down the alley.

When I returned to our booth, Gerald was speaking to another exhibitor who was wearing one of those sleep apnea mask things. Gerald tried it on and started talking like Darth Vader. The gentleman laughed, but I could tell he was really annoyed.

I excused myself to go to the men's room, and as I walked in I heard a loud crash. The door to one of the stalls had fallen off its hinges onto the man who was inside. Fortunately, the victim had not yet lowered his drawers and was uninjured.

§ **May 26.** I have the *grippe*. Lucie stayed home to play nurse, doing nice things for me like making me lemonade and omelettes. I caught up on my e-mail, then Lucie and I watched *The 400 Blows* and *Stolen Kisses* again.

§ **May 29.** I am still ill, so I called in sick. I had to move the car, so Lucie and I took the opportunity to shop for a coffee table. Of course, everything we saw was too expensive. All the same, it's probably better to have more taste than money than more money than taste. Brie and pear sandwiches for dinner while watching a documentary called "Beavers: Dam it All." To bed at 9:00.

§ **May 30.** Today I received what I regard as a suspicious piece of mail, a bulging, legal-sized brown envelope. I couldn't tell what was inside, but it was about the size of a pack of cigarettes. It was addressed to me; under my name it said "Walgreen Man 0139." The apartment number was wrong and written in pencil; it was postmarked from Manteca, California with no return address. Since it's addressed to "Mr. or Ms.", the sender obviously doesn't know either of us. I threw the thing in the trash when I got upstairs.

§ **August 24.** Upon arrival at Charles de Gaulle, we called Georges then took the RER to the Luxembourg station; we dragged our suitcases across the gardens in ninety-degree heat to our sixth-floor apartment at 66, rue de Vaugirard. One must take the elevator to the fifth floor (the sixth by American reckoning), then walk down a crooked hall to a narrow, ancient

staircase, up to the top floor, then down another crooked hall to our door, which bears no number. Once inside, there is a bathroom and kitchen (both tiny, although the bathroom has an interesting octagonal-shaped toilet) to the left, the bedroom, with its low, slanted ceiling and wall of cupboards, to the right; further back is the living and dining room. The décor was not our cup of tea—a tiny, framed Monet poster on a plastic easel on the mantelpiece; a pair of uncomfortable cobalt blue foam-cushioned loveseats; and a bevy of ‘country-style’ trifles but the view more than made up for this—large French doors in the living room opened onto small balconies from which one may see the towers of St-Sulpice, St-Germain-des-Prés, and in the distance, Sacré Coeur.

It was so humid we dragged our mattresses into the living room and next to the windows which were opened wide; but due to our jet lag we didn’t sleep a wink anyway.

§ **August 25.** Up at 10:30; lunch at a brasserie called L’Horizon, then we walked down to the Gare Montparnasse to buy our tickets to Nantes, where we waited in line behind a French-speaking family whose children were waving miniature American flags. Afterwards, we went into a nearby pharmacy. The young clerk asked us what we wanted; when Lucie told him sunscreen, he led us to a shelf near the entrance. As we discussed the various brands, the automatic door, activated by our proximity to it, flapped open and shut continually—it was a rather awkward moment. The clerk seemed nervous; when the telephone rang and he turned to answer it, he tripped over a chair in the middle of the room. When he returned, I tried to ask him for shaving cream, but I didn’t know the word for it. The manager, who overheard us from a back room appeared; he was able to assist us because he knew a little English. When the clerk rang up our purchase, he seemed to have difficulty with my credit card; I think the problem had something to do with the impending conversion to the euro. As the manager helped him, we realized it was the young man’s first day on the job.

We spent the afternoon exploring the 15th *arrondissement*, which seemed quite deserted, as many Parisians are still on holiday. At a café on the place du Général-Beuret, we saw our first French slob (everyone else is well-groomed and neatly dressed) emerge from the café, then wait in his double-parked Saab while blasting American rap music. I call him a ‘slob’ because he wore a filthy denim jacket with its sleeves cut off, baggy “cargo” style shorts, and badly-worn sandals; his hair was uncombed and his general appearance was

that of a person who does not wash. As he finally drove away, he honked impatiently at a woman and her three children, who were in the crosswalk and (presumably) had the right of way.

We rested at the café for an hour, watching the world go by. Parked across the street was a cheap 'dirt bike' on which was painted an American "stars 'n' stripes" design; nearby, a neon horse's head advertised horse meat – J. Leban, *boucherie chevaline, viande extra*. To our left, a large, bright green plastic container with a hole at eye-level – this is where one places one's recycling. Everyone in this neighborhood is white.

At the Esplanade du Souvenir Français, a tree-lined greenbelt which once was probably a broad boulevard, Lucie and I rested on the lawn (no *pelouse interdit* signs here), where we observed an elderly woman reading a book. We were briefly alarmed when we were approached by an athletic gentleman wielding nunchuks, but he fortunately walked by us as if we didn't exist.

We proceeded up the rue d'Estrées to the lovely chinoiserie Pagoda theater; we admired its architecture but didn't enter the building, which appeared to be closed; behind us at the Lycée, the faint strains of a violin could be heard. We next walked down the rue Monsieur where Lucie pointed out Nancy Mitford's old house. At the square Boucicault we paused again to rest and listen to a young guitarist play Bach and Sor. It was late in the afternoon, and the sun cast long shadows through the leaves, which rustled in the warm breeze; it was all I could do to keep from nodding off where I sat. Dinner at a smoke-filled café (I neglected to write down its name) before returning to the apartment, where we read until we went to bed at nine o'clock.

Lucie brought her pedometer, which measures the number of steps you walked. To-day we walked 17,500 steps, roughly 8.5 miles.

**§ August 26.** After another sleepless night, Lucie and I departed at six o'clock for our trip to Nantes. The sun had risen but the streets were still completely deserted. On the TGV, we watched as the Parisian landscape gave way to dismal graffiti-covered projects, warehouses, factories, depressing suburbs, then finally, the most picturesque countryside I have ever seen, rolling verdant farmland dotted with barns, sheep, copses, and fences, which reminded me a little of Kentucky.

Louis met us at the train depot; I hadn't seen him since '96. He seemed a bit thin, but I found his appearance agreeable; life in France seems to suit

him. We embraced, then he took us on a whirlwind tour of the town. We saw the château, memorable for its wrought-iron medieval well and duckweed-filled moat, and a delightful botanical garden with every variety of plant, each labeled with its Latin name. After luncheon at one of many *crêperies*, popular in this region, we relaxed for a while at Louis' apartment in the rue du 14 juillet, the concierge's old room in an ancient but non-descript building. The room was decorated simply, the way Louis' rooms have always been—an iron-framed bed under the window, a desk piled high with books and manuscripts, an old wooden chair, and a small wooden table under which sat a small record player and some albums. By now, Lucie and I were nearly dead of exhaustion and felt that we could finally sleep. Louis suggested we stay the night in Nantes, but I was ready to sleep for a very long time and just wanted to get the trip back to Paris over with. We managed to take an earlier train, but were stuck in the smoking car for the two and a half-hour ride. Inferior Chinese takeout for dinner; to bed at 9:15. Distance walked to-day: 20,809 steps or 10.5 miles.

§ **August 27.** Lucie and slept indeed, until three o'clock in the afternoon. It's much cooler to-day, cloudy and windy. We dressed and went to the Jardin du Luxembourg, which we had practically to ourselves. To Champion for groceries; we then returned home for a dinner of sandwiches and fruit. It's difficult to cook anything too extravagant because the kitchen is so small, basically a glorified alcove with a tiny sink, toaster oven, hot plate, *poubelle*, refrigerator, and a confusing combination washer and dryer. *Flânerie* on the rue de l'Université for the rest of the evening until we ran out of steam; on the way home we went down the rue Royer Collard to see our old apartment, in front of which sat a belligerent *clochard* who shouted obscenities at us. To bed at 9:30. Distance walked to-day: 14,672 steps.

§ **August 28.** We're still sleeping on the floor by the windows because it's so pleasantly cool, rather like San Francisco. I woke up at three o'clock and looked out over the rooftops, the only sound was the wind and an occasional scooter in the distance. *Tartines* for breakfast at the café on the corner, then we wandered around the 7th to the 16th, stopping along the way to see Serge Gainsbourg's house, which was covered with graffiti, fan letters, and stencils of his visage. At the Eiffel Tower we paused to gawk at the pandemonium of tourists. Everyone was fat, sunburned, and eating *barbe à papa* (I love that name—"Papa's Beards") and ice cream cones from

the numerous nearby ice cream stands (these exist nowhere else in Paris that I know of). All the souvenir vendors were minorities, their arms loaded with miniature Eiffel Towers on large rings.

Across the Seine, Lucie and I witnessed a young father pick up a traffic cone, then shout through it at his toddler for laughs; however, the stunt terrified the little tyke, who burst into tears. Delphine was right, Passy is very “NAP”, which is what people say now instead of “BCBG”. The women in this *quartier* look like clones of Patsy from “Absolutely Fabulous.” While Lucie went into Sephora, I stayed outdoors to watch people; I was pleased when a young Dutch woman asked me for directions to the Métro and I gave them to her in French—I almost felt like a local! I was surprised by the large number of SUV’s in the neighborhood, as I hadn’t really seen any until now. Distance walked to-day: 15,001 steps.

§ **August 29.** Breakfast at home, then off to explore the 13th, past the old hospitals—Baudelocque, Val de Grâce, Cochin—down the rue de la Santé, then we zig-zagged our way to the Cité Florale, once a swamp in the 19th century but now a charming neighborhood of distinctive, petite brick houses situated on a small maze of streets named after flowers—rue des Orchidées, rue des Volubilis, rue des Glycines, &c. I had to laugh when I saw a flyer taped to a pole which said “PROBLEME D’ARGENT? TRAVAILLEZ DE VOTRE DOMICILE”; underneath was a phone number one could call to begin making money today. As we stopped to read the bumper stickers on the back of an old Volkswagen van, there suddenly appeared a mob of dozens of German tourists on bicycles, who rode past us slowly as we waved to each of them. As we found our way back to busy streets, we saw several African women wearing the colorful, traditional garb of their country (I can’t guess which one it was); they looked really wonderful. I can hardly describe them; I guess I could never be a travel writer. Behind them, a large electronic billboard advertised *Lord of the Dance*.

Soon we had arrived at the Parc Montsouris, or “Mouse Mountain”, throughout which families, children, and students from the nearby université did whatever people do when they go to the park. We watched as a group of children used sticks to retrieve a soccer ball which had bounced into a pond. Halfway up a the hill, an overweight working class couple picnicked; the man was right out of a Pagnol film, with his protruding belly, beret, thick, curly moustache, and pipe. His wife had a huge beehive hairdo, heels and a pencil skirt and tight sleeveless blouse which accentuated her ample assets.

Scattered about at their feet and on nearby benches were several plastic bags of food and a bottle of Evian.

We took the Métro to the Gare d'Austerlitz, then walked through the Jardin des Plantes to the Arènes de Lutèce where we watched the locals play boules. A delicious and relatively inexpensive dinner at the ancient Polidor, which was packed with students, locals, and tourists; we helped a good-natured elderly German couple at the next table read the menu, which was in both English and French (but not German). Distance walked to-day: 16,986 steps.

§ **September 1.** We moved to a different apartment, this one at 10, rue St-Louis-en-l'Île, next to the Hotel Lambert once home to Baudelaire and Gautier. We're on the top floor once again in a tiny but attractive loft. After unpacking, we went to the Puces de St-Ouen, a district of flea markets and antique dealers on the north side of town. To get there, we took the Métro to Porte de Clignancourt, then walked several blocks through one of those depressing kinds of neighborhoods one finds underneath freeway overpasses. By the time we arrived, we were famished; we followed the sounds of distant music to Chez Louissette, a jolly little café at the far corner of marché Vernaison. The interior was festive—black & white checkered tile floor, coloured lights, Noël decorations, streamers, banners, and several small disco balls. The proprietor was a rotund, rosy-cheeked middle-aged gentleman who smooched Lucie's cheeks and called her his *amour de sa vie*. An aging but *très élégante* chanteuse sang French songs in the manner of Edith Piaf, accompanied by a mustachioed guitarist and a woman playing an ancient Farfisa organ.

After this colorful luncheon, during which the proprietor brought Lucie and I unsolicited slices of German chocolate birthday cake, we sauntered out into the *puces* and began pawing through a marvelous selection of French gewgaws, whatnots and *bric-à-brac*, all of it at once familiar and yet strange—a '50s-era wall chart of the different cuts of beef, labeled in French; a stack of ZZ Top, Bob Newhart, and Scott Baio LPs(!), a Native American headdress, faded but magnificent curtains from divers châteaux, antique gynecological contraptions, wicker fainting couches, jars of (dead) tarantulas, crusty chandeliers, primitive weapons, and so on. But what really caught my eye was a pair of boar's hoof candlesticks, the *perfect* birthday gift for my brother. *Combien ça coûte*, I said to a woman on a bar stool, holding one of the candlesticks up for her to see. She looked annoyed because in my excite-

ment I had forgotten to say, *Bonjour, Madame*. She disappeared into the darkness of the shop to consult the proprietor, then returned with the bad news. “1,600,” was her reply, or, roughly \$240. I nodded, then studied the candlesticks carefully while trying to decide if I really wanted to spend that much—it’s not every day one encounters such a fine pair of boar’s hoof candlesticks as these. While lifting one of the candlesticks, the brass fitting at the top which holds the candle came loose from the hoof, which tumbled to the pavement with a loud *crack*; I could feel the sting of hoof chips upon my ankle. I looked up to see the proprietor and the woman staring at me, wondering what I had done. I quickly put down the candlesticks and entered their shop as if nothing had happened, but out of the corner of my eye I could see the proprietor scrutinizing the candlesticks, looking down at the ground, then looking at me. Just then, a group of tourists appeared and began asking questions. While the gentleman was distracted, I quit the shop and walked quickly down the alley; as soon as I turned the corner I began to run as fast I could. Out of breath, I caught up with Lucie at the marché Malassis and told her what had happened. I figured it was highly probable the proprietor was searching for me, so Lucie and I kept a wary eye on the crowds as we rifled through drawers of art déco-era fashion drawings (originals, which were reproduced in magazines and catalogs) and antique maps. In the end I chose for my brother an illuminated 18th-century coat of arms in blue, red, and gold.

After we had exhausted ourselves (and our wallets) at the *puces*, Lucie and I left to have dinner with Delphine and Amar. We took the south exit of the marché Malassis, which led us to a crowded immigrant market where, instead of antique linens and hotel silver, one could purchase discounted Nike athletic shoes, Bart Simpson t-shirts, or cheap electronics. Lucie and I slowly made our way through the throng to the avenue Michelet, where there was a terrific traffic jam, an *embouteillage* which put the Bay Bridge toll plaza’s notorious gridlock to shame. The intersection leading to the Périphérique on-ramp was crammed with cars, each nearly touching the other’s bumper (or door), horns blaring, none moving. For a few minutes we stopped to regard the chaos, unbelieving, then proceeded to the Métro, where we transferred to the RER which took us to the bland northwestern suburb of Achères.

Situated next to the train depot in a vast complex of dismal-looking featureless buildings surrounded by a sea of parking lots, Delphine’s building was difficult to find; unbeknownst to us, we had circled it several times before returning to the depot to use a telephone. After we told her where we were,



she stuck her head out her window and waved.

Delphine's one-bedroom apartment, which she bought last year, is petite by American standards, but comfortable, its furnishings a combination of family heirlooms and Ikea. Two blue canvas sofas formed an "L" in the corner next to a rattan coffee table, nearby was a glass dining table and four practical chairs. A small rattan bookcase held some books, mostly French translations of Stephen King and Danielle Steel, a small hi-fi next to a stack of classical compact discs, and a portable television. The kitchen was American-style but still very small; down a short hall was a bathroom and a bedroom which we weren't shown.

Dinner was a three-hour affair with several courses, a spread of salmon and cream cheese on little pieces of toast, a simple salad, quiche of cheese and *fines herbes*, followed by an experimental desert, which was a sort of nut and fruit pastry which Delphine had never made before and was anxious to know what we thought of it. When I said it was "pas terrible," she and Amar about died laughing. Despite our imperfect French and Amar's even weaker English (Delphine's is nearly fluent), we were able to communicate without much difficulty; we even talked about poetry and philosophy while managing to make ourselves understood to one another. When I told Delphine about the boar's hoof candlestick incident, she placed the blame solely upon the proprietor, who "should have known" the candlesticks were fragile and was just asking for a mishap so he could take advantage of an unsuspecting customer. This attitude surprised me, as in America it's "You break it, you buy it."

At 2:00 a.m. Delphine and Amar offered to drive us home in her new Volkswagen Jetta; distracted by her cell phone, she had crashed her other car a week earlier. As we were leaving, Lucie reminded her to blow out the candles, but Delphine insisted there was no harm in leaving them burning. We took the back roads through Sartrouville to see Delphine's old apartment building, then through La Défense to the étoile, which she negotiated while turned around in her seat; Lucie and I gripped our own seats in anticipation of the impact, which never came. The Champs-élysées was a veritable parking lot of cars filled with suburban partygoers through which we crawled at an escargot's pace. To bed at 4:00. Steps taken today: 11,600.

§ **September 2.** Up at 10:00; Lucie and I explored the busy Marais, bustling with homosexuals and Orthodox Jews, then the neighborhood surrounding the place de la Bastille, which we found rather down at the heels.

We observed a woman dining at a café with an outrageous pink picture hat (which called to mind the fancy lady dog in P. D. Eastman's *Are You My Mother?*, in which she inquires, "Do you like my hat?"). North of the *place* was a small amusement park with various rides, games, and so forth, where we sat and watched the children. We later zig-zagged our way to the place des Vosges where we enjoyed a small chamber orchestra playing Vivaldi before discovering a lovely antique furniture shop. We found a exquisite walnut burlwood French art déco occasional table for a reasonable price, but the English proprietress balked at our request to have it shipped to San Francisco. She asked for our phone number and said she would check with UPS and get back to us. As we left the shop, we paused to listen to an excellent jazz ensemble, whose style was similar to that found on Serge Gainsbourg's early albums.

From our loft bedroom window one may see the upper portion of the Eiffel Tower. At dusk they turn on a revolving search light; as the sun set behind the tower I watched the light as if hypnotized. As we went to bed I considered closing the shutters but decided against it; despite its brightness I wanted to be able to see the light at any given moment as a reminder of where I was. Steps taken today: 13, 262.

§ **September 3.** A dark, rainy day. We stayed home and read, but later decided to go to the Musée d'Orsay—museums are good for rainy days. After taking the Métro there, we found to our dismay that the Orsay is closed on Mondays, so we went to a café on the nearby rue de Bellechasse and spent the rest of the afternoon talking and reading. I had left my umbrella at the Solférino Métro station; on the way home I looked for it but it was gone, of course. Steps taken today: 12,773.

§ **September 4.** We spent the day exploring the 7th arrondissement; at a petite antique shop on the rue du Bac we found an amazing bronze Beaux Arts candle chandelier. The proprietor was charming; we must have spent two hours in his shop. I was eating an ice cream cone from across the street; when he asked how it was, I made him laugh when I replied in halting French, "Pas mal, mais ce n'est pas Berthillon." He admitted Berthillon was his favourite, too. When we asked if he could ship the chandelier to us, he tried to convince us to put it in a suitcase, but it would had to have been an awfully large suitcase, which we didn't have, and didn't want to trouble with—the chandelier must have weighed over fifty pounds.

Later, we passed a shop window in which a large, stuffed bear was reclining on a sofa—it was Deyrolles, a century-old taxidermy shop (with creaky wooden floors which must have pre-dated the shop by another hundred years, at least) filled with every conceivable beast, including butterflies and insects of every variety. Lucie spied a stuffed boar's head—"Mother wants one of those for her 'medieval' room!" I didn't know how to say "boar" in French, so I asked a shop assistant, *Combien ça coûte, la tête avec les dents*—at this, I gestured to the boar's head, then made a beastly face, using two fingers for fangs. He laughed, then turned to the proprietress and repeated my question to her, verbatim, which meant my sentence must have been well-formed, if a little vague. After some discussion, it was determined the boar's head was too old and fragile to survive a trans-continental flight. I'm sure we can find one at home for Lucie's mother, somehow. At home I called the Englishwoman about the table and left a message. Steps taken today: 11,999.

**§ September 5.** Lucie and I walked the length of the rue du Faubourg St-Honoré, where Lucie purchased all sorts of wonderful girly things—negligées, parfums, and so forth. It was an exhausting day of shopping, really. In the late afternoon we found ourselves atop the Arc de Triomphe, when Lucie had an episode of heart palpitations which wouldn't stop. Remembering that a sneeze had stopped it the last time, we tried to no avail to induce her to sneeze. We descended the arch and rested on a bench, unsure of what to do next. It was at last decided I would go to a nearby café and obtain some pepper.

I made haste down the Champs élysées for a few blocks until I did find a busy café. As I entered, my eyes roamed the room, searching for pepper in any form, a shaker, a packet, whatever. The *hôtesse* regarded me with suspicion, asking me what I wanted. When I tried to explain, *Ma femme, elle est malade, elle a besoin du poivre*, she ushered me out the door, telling me to try the grocer's. Next, I spied a McDonald's and went in, but there was no pepper to be found, so I waited in one of over a dozen long lines. When I at last reached the counter, I was told I had to buy something, so I ordered a hamburger. Pepper in hand, I raced back to Lucie, who by this time was feeling better and didn't need the pepper. Starving, we shared the hamburger and headed for the nearest Métro station. With all the walking we've been doing, I have worn a large hole in the sole of my shoe! These shoes are rather unconventional; it won't be possible to get them re-soled, so I have no choice but to toss them into the *poubelle*—and they were my

favourites! Steps taken today: 18,036.

§ **September 6.** Lucie and I spent the day preparing for dinner with Delphine (Amar had to return to Dunkerque after we saw him last week), shopping for groceries, cleaning house, and cooking. I called the Englishwoman about the table and left another message. Delphine arrived at 8:00; Lucie had prepared a spinach salad with a vinaigrette dressing, and a pasta dish consisting of orechiettes, sun-dried tomatoes, pignolias, feta cheese and olive oil; for desert, Berthillon ice cream packed for takeout in a little box of the kind used for Chinese food in the States. Afterward we talked and drank wine all evening; at 1:30 a.m. we walked her to her car, then returned home and went to bed.

§ **September 7.** Our last day in Paris! After giving the candle chandelier one last thought, we ended up buying a pair of silver Corinthian column candlesticks at the Galerie de l'Assemblée on the place du Palais Bourbon. We made our way to the Quartier Latin, window shopping, relaxing in cafés, and being general *flâneurs*; by dinner time we ended up at the restaurant Sud-Ouest, where Lucie had the poulet à l'estragon and I had the escargot. We afterwards had a drink at the Piano Vache, then dragged our feet home, pausing at every opportunity to listen to string quartets, explore quaint streets, and watch people. We saw a headbanger wearing an Emperor t-shirt, spiked collar, and macabre makeup—an unusual sight in Paris. Back at the apartment I took one last look at the rotating lights atop the Eiffel Tower, then went to sleep.

§ **September 8.** Up at 5:30 for our miserable trip back to San Francisco. The flight home was a nightmare, as usual, and when we got home the culture shock was almost unbearable, I felt like Cinderella the morning after. As angry as I am about how awful it is where we live, I don't want to record my foul thoughts here for fear that I might be unfair; after all, San Francisco is no Paris, not by a long shot. There must be *something* good about America; I must try to find out what it is. Oh, and that Englishwoman never called us about the table.

# Chapter 4

## 2002

§ **January 1.** Lucie and I slept until nearly noon until we were awakened by the obnoxious sound of someone throwing “snappers” out their window.

We saw *Fellowship of the Ring* at the AMC 1000 Van Ness, an unimaginative name for a theater. The queue was long, but we arrived early enough to purchase tickets and secure our favorite seats in the back row, the one with only three seats in it. While waiting to be admitted, I noticed several people clutching well-thumbed copies of Tolkien’s works. A Chinese gentleman before us turned and asked me if I had read the trilogy. When I replied in the affirmative, he proceeded to ask in a quarrelsome manner dozens of questions about hobbits, the book’s allegorical content (Tolkien asserted there is none), the nature of Sauron, &c. Mercifully the doors were opened and the conversation was cut short.

I can’t stand to be put into close contact with people I try so hard to avoid when outside a theater. The gum-smacking, the baseball caps, the cell phones, the laser pointers, the little electronic beeping devices, the coarse voices, the reek of cheap cologne, body odour, and stick deodorant, the maddening sound of plastic bags and candy wrappers, the smell of smuggled fried chicken, the jiggling seat, the filthy cup holders, the sticky floor, the horrid clothing, the throat clearing, coughing, and nose blowing, the screaming baby, the hyperactive brat, &c. *Fellowship of the Ring* is one of those phenomena whose massive appeal attracts even the lowest scumbags, apes, and gangsters. And one cannot overlook the pre-movie “attractions” – endless

commercials, idiotic Hollywood trivia, the repetitive, mindless dance music blaring out of four hundred “surround-sound” sub-woofers and über-tweeters, the flying cartoon robots who repair the broken Dolby logo, the anthropomorphic piece of film with the bow tie and baton, the close-ups of bubbling nachos and fizzing Coca-Cola, the dubious synthesizer crescendo (“The audience is listening”), the trailers for movies you’d pay *not* to see, with their monotonous explosions, jump-cut “strobe light” editing, gratuitous violence, pouting bimbos, obnoxious leading men, the too-loud soundtrack, the faecal jokes, the scene where the protagonist stands atop a mountain, hands raised to the sky, as the camera revolves around him from above as the sickly sweet violins swell above the 150-decibel level. Ugh!

§ **January 4.** This evening Lucie and I saw *Gosford Park*. There were a remarkable number of balding, middle-aged men with eyeglasses in the all-white audience. We arrived early to secure decent seats, and so therefore had to endure thirty minutes of insipid movie trivia, Coca-Cola ads, and unpleasant dance music. Finally, the lights dimmed and there were another fifteen minutes of extreme sports and “in your face” video game commercials at which some audience members hissed.

Next to me sat a sorority girl who kept jiggling her bottled water in her cup holder, and next to Lucie were to guys with a plaid blanket spread over their laps. Throughout the movie, I kept hearing change falling on the floor beneath them. Later, Lucie said she was certain they had been petting each other.

About halfway through the movie I excused myself to go to the men’s room, for which there was a long line. The gentleman in front of me, who looked like a white supremacist, kept shouting things like, “Man, I gotta piss like a *race horse*!” and “Don’t make me [something unintelligible] my *dick* in the sink!” Rather than risk having to stand next to him at a urinal I waited for the next available stall. Presently, one was vacated by a gentleman dressed in the manner of Willy Wonka, of Chocolate Factory fame, complete with purple top hat and green felt cravat. Why he was dressed this way I cannot fathom; he must be employed by the theatre.

§ **January 7.** This morning I found several love letters scattered upon the sidewalk in front of our building. They were written on spiral notebook paper which had been elaborately decorated by hand in various colors of ink

from felt-tipped markers, the effect of which was not unpleasant, until one read the text, which dribbled on repetitively in a barbarous tongue, riddled with misspellings, underworld slang, and pornographic allusions—here are a few choice excerpts (spelling, punctuation, &c. are the author’s):

*Love you down*

*It never really matter to much, that you were just too damn old for me, all that really mattered was your my boyfriend, and baby that’s all that matters to me.*

This is followed by a rhymed couplet:

*Let me love you down, even if it takes all night*

*Let me love you down, you know that I could be so right.*

After some further talk of “loving down” the recipient, the euphemism becomes suddenly clear:

*...dont forget what a champ I am at talkin’ to hagar my love...I start rubing, I want hagar to come out and play. I look at you with a michevious smile, and I sway my hips. You nod, and I rip your pants open and get to work.*

Another letter reads:

*This just aint my mother fuckin’ week! On Friday I ran away with Joseph, on Sunday I watched Brian get beat down, return home Monday, Tuesday lost Joseph, and wensday alex is acting like a Bitch and won’t give me my I.D. cause he found it in B.’s car. And her actin’ like he dont know what tha fuck I was doin’. Duh, I was stuffing B.’s [hagar] deep down my throat. Come on now, I can’t help it, I’s loves a [hagar] in my mouth!*

On the back in large letters is scrawled, *One of the worst birthdays of my life my 19th birthday.*

§ **January 8.** Left work early at 3:00 and took BART to the Castro to meet Lucie for dinner. I was early, so went into Aardvark Books to browse for a while, leaving with a first edition of Guerber’s *The Myths of the Norsemen* for \$6.

We had dinner at a restaurant called Blue, which was a sort of “Asian Moderne” diner. The sole decorative touches in an otherwise featureless room were an aluminum planter full of wheat grass and an electronic display which flashed messages like, “I resolve to eat mac and cheese every day. The music was no better than that of every other restaurant, an ’80s mix which

included “Pac Man Fever”, “Rebel Yell”, and “Shout”, songs quite unsuitable for aiding one’s digestion. When the waitress saw we hadn’t finished our fried calamari, she asked, “Did you like your calamari?”

“Actually, no,” Lucie replied.

“Would you mind saying why?”

Lucie and I glanced at each other. “Well...it’s too soggy and salty,” I offered.

“There’s too much soy sauce on it,” Lucie added.

“Hmm...we’re well-known for our calamari. Let me take that away for you.” As she left the table she added, “Thanks for being honest.”

When the check came I saw she hadn’t charged us for the calamari.

After dinner we bought tickets for the film *Wisconsin Death Trip*. We were early, so I bought Lucie some ice cream and we walked up and down Castro, where we were continually pestered by beggars, including a hideously deformed one who followed us into Walgreens then stole a box of chocolate-covered cherries right in front of us.

While waiting to be let into the theater, the deformed beggar reappeared, waving a mug at everyone and making retching sounds. Nearby, an athletic young man with a clipboard called out in a bored voice, “Clean Water Initiative.” No one seemed interested.

Presently we were let in, and Lucie and I took our seats near the center of the theatre which was standing room only. After the lights dimmed, a woman sitting next to Lucie caused a minor disturbance when she dropped her bottled water and it rolled all the way to the front of the theater.

We rather enjoyed the film, but two Lesbians seated in front of us kept laughing hysterically at any scene which reinforced gender stereotypes, while a man behind me kept snorting.

**§ January 10.** Afghan food (of the fast variety) at the Emeryville Public Market. Having never eaten Afghan food before, I found it similar to Indian food.

On the way home from the bus station I was obliged to share the sidewalk with a violent black man who was shouting oaths and beating his chest. I quickened my pace and gradually out-distanced him, but not without much fear and trembling. Of course, I could have crossed the street, but if I did



so every time I encountered a person of questionable behavior I would never reach my destination.

Lucie and I were disturbed all evening by a kid down at the playground who had been given a whistle and was blowing it repeatedly. I prayed he would choke on it.

§ **January 11.** As Lucie and I walked down O'Farrell this morning, we overtook a Hispanic boy who was vomiting on his feet as he walked, unbeknownst to his mother and siblings ahead of him.

Luncheon again in Emeryville. The freeway was backed up, so I took the frontage road all the way to Powell. At one point, an elderly woman in a Crown Victoria cruised by me on the wrong side of the road. I blared my horn, thinking she might have fallen asleep at the wheel, whereby she swerved back into the correct lane. At the next stop sign, she turned left onto the freeway on-ramp from the wrong lane, while a north-bound driver waited patiently. I shudder to think what happened once she was on the freeway.

§ **January 14.** There was a small earthquake this morning just after I arrived at the office. The building was shaken by a single jolt, as if someone had slammed a giant door. I checked the USGS web site, which said it was a 2.3 and centered right near where I work.

Last night I accidentally washed my wallet while doing laundry. Most everything was salvageable, but my brand-new booklet of bus tickets disintegrated into a small ball of fuzz. The wallet, which was already old, could not be saved.

At lunch I drove to K-Mart in Emeryville hoping to find a new wallet, but when I got there, I found K-Mart had been replaced by a Home Depot Expo. The only other place I could think of to get a wallet in the East Bay was Target in Albany, so I got back on the freeway. Once there, I had trouble finding the wallet section, but at last I saw a large sign which said "Wallets". However, the wallet section had been completely picked clean except for a red Velcro thing on the floor. I ended up getting a wallet from Macy's on the way home.

§ **January 16.** Walking down Market St. this morning, I found the pieces of a four foot-high Eiffel Tower, which I took to work. Upon assembling it I found that one of the pieces required to give the miniature landmark stability was missing, so now it leans in the corner of my office, unassembled and forlorn.

§ **January 17.** I was awakened at 5:00 this morning by the jingling of a “bizzy ball”. I stumbled out of bed and searched for the offending toy on all fours, in the dark, without my glasses, while Monty and Loulou watched from atop the coffee table (I imagine this amused them very much). At length I found it, but no sooner than I had slipped my feet between the sheets I heard the jingling of another bizzy ball. I must remember to collect all the bizzy balls before turning in at night.

§ **January 20.** Today at the library I received a call from a woman who wanted to know how to spell “owey”. She explained her son had been too embarrassed to call.

“Owey?” I repeated.

“You know, like a boo-boo. My son is writing a story.”

“That’s not a real word, but I’ll check the slang dictionary for you. Please hold and I’ll be right back.” After checking four slang dictionaries, I picked up the phone and told her it wasn’t in any of them.

“Well how would *you* spell it?” she demanded.

I felt like telling her I would use instead a more specific word such as *cut*, *scrape*, or *contusion*, but instead I said, “Why don’t you spell it o-w-e-y and put quotation marks around it?”

“Wait...wait...hold on...how do you spell it?” It sounded like she was scrambling for a pen and paper.

“O...”

“Hold on...OK. O...”

“W...e...y.”

“O...w...e...y?”

“Yes. O...w...e...y.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“No.”

“Can’t you check someplace else, like the encyclopedia?”

“It won’t be in there.”

“Is there anybody you can ask?”

“No.”

“Alright, then. Thanks.” *Click.*

On the way home after parking the car, I began to smell an overwhelming stench. People around me were grimacing and covering their mouths and noses. I looked around, expecting to see a rotting whale carcass but could discern no obvious source for the repugnant odor. It was only after I had walked several blocks that I could breathe normally again.

Before I made it home, I was obliged to cross the street to avoid a lecherous drunkard who has grunting and making obscene “humping” gestures at passers-by while his friend sat laughing nearby.

**§ January 21.** This evening I found a wallet in our “in house” mail box. It belonged to someone with an Oregon driver’s license named Jorge Martinez. There was a piece of paper in it on which was written “Guess’s” followed by several names and one local phone number, which I called.

“Hello, may I speak to Jorge Martinez?”

I heard someone shouting in Spanish, then a male voice replied, “Who?”

“Jorge Martinez. I found his wallet.”

“Hees *waller*?”

“Yes.”

“Ahh...wait one minute.” The speaker returned a moment later and said, “Hees no here.”

“I’d like to return his wallet. Can you tell me where you are so I can bring it by?”

“Hees *waller*?”

“Yes, his *wallet*.”

“Ahh...I work with heem.”

“Do you know his phone number?”

“Ahh...I will tell heem you call.”

I left my name and number, which had to be repeated a dozen times. Somehow, I don't think Mr. Martinez will call me. After I hung up, I wondered how one says "wallet" in Spanish.

§ **January 24.** On the way home our bus broke down on the Bay Bridge. The excitement was short-lived, however, as another bus picked us up moments later.

This evening I had to call the playground and complain because someone was banging on a flagpole repeatedly. A nice man said he would make it stop, and a moment later it did.

§ **January 25.** Duke called to say he and Percy could not make it tomorrow for dinner because Percy was in the hospital with an affliction of the lungs. He gave us the number, but when Lucie called she said Percy was gasping for air and couldn't talk. It sounds positively awful; I do hope he recovers soon.

§ **January 28.** Percy died last night of pneumonia and congestive heart failure.

§ **September 19.** Lucie and I had intended to get up at 6:30, but neither one of us got much sleep because of the heat and a neighbour's ear-splitting stereo. We slept in until 9:00, then Lucie left for a doctor's appointment. I worked for a while then walked to Whole Foods (which is mercifully empty on weekday mornings) for lettuce and fruit. On the way there I saw the red-headed wheelchair bum and some other bum shouting insults at each other across the street. Both sounded completely wasted.

Red-Headed Wheelchair Bum: (I had never heard him speak before, believing him to be a mute) "You're a punk!"

Toothless Bum: "Why don't you come over here and say that to my *face* you son of a bitch?"

On the way home I overheard a man standing in front of Hanaro Cocktails brag to his friend, "Oh yeah? Well I stole two bottles of vodka from that liquor store right *there*..." Meanwhile, the friend, who seemed not to be listening, was saying, "...I spent three months in jail for..." I never have my tape recorder with me when I need it.

As I entered the lobby of our building, I overheard our security guard Betty say to the other guard Ken, "...otherwise I was on methadone."

I spent the rest of the afternoon working, sweating (it was in the 90s today, rare for San Francisco) and listening to scratchy tango records..

The newspapers say today the nation is at an "Orange level status alert", whatever that is.

§ **September 21.** Woke up at 6:30 and took a walk over Nob and Russian Hill. The fog has returned in all its glory. We took a rest at Le Boulanger on Polk St., coffee for Lucie and a pain chocolat and lemonade for me. We always get any table we want early in the morning, but the café was soon crowded with yuppies, all in expensive gym clothes and many with dogs. The rustle of newspapers and discreet conversations soon gave way to musical cell phones and loud voices. Those who got their coffee "to go" double-parked their Range Rovers out front, snarling traffic in our immediate area. Presently, two very obnoxious men sat in front of us and began a shouted conversation while their dog Chelsea, a hyperactive golden retriever, pestered passersby, stretching his leash across the sidewalk so as to make it impassable. For a half hour the talk was about tires, how much they cost, rims, tire sales, tire brands, &c., punctuated by the occasional but ineffective "Chelsea...sit!" It became difficult to hear oneself think. Then, their gum-smacking, blousy blonde girl friend joined them. We heard all about how much AOL costs and how she's forgotten her password because it's been over six months since she logged in. When the garbage truck stopped at our corner it was time to go to class at the Alliance Française.

I was not *en forme* today, having gotten little sleep again. Before Nadja showed up, Bill went on *ad infinitum* about some movie called *Drummer-Crab* (I looked it up on the World Wide Web just now; its French title is *Le Crabe-tambour*), repeating the same details over and over. Nadja always begins class with the question, "Quoi de neuf?" and today I had nothing to say other than that I was *très fatigué*. She was nice about it, and told me "Bon courage!"

After class we went to Whole Foods for lettuce, fruit, and cheese. There was a street fair on our end of Polk St., with lots of booths set up displaying bad art, knishes, and beer. People were lined up to use the computers at the Monster.com tent while on a nearby stage a band played rhythm 'n' blues.

At home we took down a few loads of laundry, then went upstairs and

had ham and butter on baguette sandwiches while watching coverage of the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Spring 2003 coverage on the Style Network. Lauren Ezersky was funny messing around with various objects in Betsey Johnson's house in the Hamptons (Johnson showed her collection there; the sun was in everyone's eyes but it seemed to be a big success, otherwise). Her and Diane von Furtsenberg's collections were great but we had to change the channel when Calvin Klein's stuff came on.

§ **September 22.** Someone abandoned a battery-powered talking bass in the basement. I brought it upstairs; what I'll do with it I don't yet know.

§ **September 24.** I brought the talking fish to work today and hung it in Oliver's office. Later, he knocked on my door wearing a grin; he said he knew I had done it—who else in our office would have?

§ **September 28.** Lucie and I went to see the new Godard film, *In Praise of Love*, at Opera Plaza. We enjoyed the movie very much, despite having to tell three people to be quiet. The couple behind us kept talking in normal voices and laughing idiotically at everything. They even laughed when I went *shhhh* at them. Fortunately, they walked out of the film after twenty minutes. Then there was an old woman two rows behind us who kept making noise with a plastic wrapper or bag. I turned around twice to shush her but she wouldn't stop. Finally, Lucie got up, walked back to where the woman was, and said, "Will you please *stop* doing whatever you're doing...you're wrecking the movie for us!"

"You must have *awfully* good ears, to hear what I'm doing."

After a brief argument, Lucie went to summon the manager. As soon as she left, I could hear the old woman scramble to put away her plastic things. The manager appeared but I couldn't hear what he was saying to the woman. Later I asked Lucie what the woman's deal was. Lucie said the old woman had a big piece of cellophane and was folding it and unfolding it and twisting it around, and that next to her was a big plastic bag filled with other wadded up plastic bags.

After going to bed at 10:00, I heard a commotion outside. I got up and looked out the window to see a bunch of people on the roof of a nearby building; they were filming a rap video. There were a bunch of bright lights

shining on a rapper who was standing on the edge of the building, rapping for all he was worth. There was music but it was faint. Their whole production went away after an hour or so.

§ **September 29.** At the library today I helped a young man find books on submarines. While I was searching for a particular title, he said to me, “I like your hairdo.”

“Really? Why, thank you.”

“It looks really good.”

§ **October 9.** Lucie telephoned me at the office and said somebody got hit by the train this morning. She said hers went by the scene shortly after it happened, and there were body parts strewn along the tracks for two hundred yards. The largest piece of the body was covered with a sheet, but the dozens of smaller pieces were clearly visible because of the little numbered flags placed near each one by the authorities.

§ **October 10.** It’s terrible Fleet Week again. From noon until 4:00 Lucie and I were tortured by low-flying jet fighters rocketing over the city, which really rattled our nerves, not to mention setting off car alarms and making our building shake. I don’t know who they think they are, but I am *not* impressed by people showing off in any kind of vehicle, nor by pompous displays of military machismo. One of these days they’re going to crash into Coit Tower, *mark my words*.

For dinner we met Charles, Bob and Dana at à la Turca for dinner. Bob just landed a book deal ghost-writing some famous wrestler’s autobiography, so we talked about wrestling for a while (Bob did most of the talking; we feigned interest), then politics. Afterward, Lucie and I walked Charles to his car, which was parked in a dark alley nearby. He drove us home (only two blocks, but what the hell), letting us out at the corner so we could buy cat litter. To bed at 10:30.

§ **October 13.** I brought home a lovely 1890’s-era six-volume set of Balzac from the library book sale room. On the way to pick up Lucie from work I got stuck in heavy traffic through Golden Gate Park. After a while I thought the clutch was going to give out on the Nissan but it got better.

§ **October 15.** I went to the salon to get my hair “relaxed.” It is definitely relaxed now, quite a lion’s mane. I feel like I should grace the cover of a cheesy romance novel (with digitally-enhanced muscles, of course).

On the way home from the salon, I witnessed a group of men pouring a new section of sidewalk at 555 Hyde. They had completely filled in with concrete the tree wells of three trees. When I told the man who appeared to be in charge, “You can’t do that. You’ll kill those trees,” he replied in a heavy but unidentifiable accent, “I hate the trees. I wish the city will chop them down.”

§ **October 16.** When Diane saw my hair this morning at work, she said, “Uh...your *hair*!” The look on her face seemed to say, “You are a freak.” I ignored her.

I called the Friends of the Urban Forest to report the endangered trees at 555 Hyde, who gave me a number for the Department of Public Works. I called them and a nice gentleman named Doug thanked me and said he’d go take a look right away.

§ **October 17.** Monty and Loulou keep sniffing the Balzac books, which are shelved at their eye level. I sniffed them myself, but they smell unremarkable to me.

§ **October 18.** Our entire evening was ruined by a horrible bloody racket outside. There is some sort of festival on Ellis behind our building, featuring marching bands, Indian music, ethnic drumming, skateboard clattering, and a lot of shouting. We shut the windows, which served only to make our apartment stuffy. Fortunately the din subsided a little after 10:00 p.m.

§ **October 19.** Lucie and I left the house at 7:00 and walked over Nob Hill, then back to the boulangerie on Polk to do our French homework. Following French class we returned home to discover yesterday’s festival was again in progress; there was no way we were going to be able to relax in our own apartment while the noise continued. At 3:30 we walked up Market to Chimes’s house for dinner. On the way, we stopped in a couple of new French antique stores we had never seen before. We also stopped in Limelight Film &



Theater Books, where I found the *Ghost World* screenplay. The proprietor said he had had a pile of signed copies but he had just sold the last this afternoon.

Chimes served us lamb and vegetables, then we sat around drinking wine and talking until 10:00. When we left, the J was just rolling by, so we hopped on it and were home twenty minutes later.

§ **October 20.** Lucie went to the library with me today. Before the library opened, we sat in the park eating sandwiches and watching a bizarre family, whose conversations I surreptitiously recorded. At noon, Ben let me in the building but whoever was scheduled for the circulation desk didn't show up. I called Walter who told me how to "boot up" the circulation system while a couple of impatient patrons stood by looking at their watches then looking at me. An hour later Liz showed up; she said she thought we opened at 1:00. The bizarre family spent the entire day in the library. Lucie spied on them but couldn't make out what they were reading.

Lucie looked up the festival on the internet; it was the 8th Annual "In the Street" Theater Festival, described as "public performances featuring theater, music, dance, spoken word, skateboarding, puppets, processions, and more by some of the top performers in the Bay Area and nationally...performances happen in the street, on rooftops, on fire escapes, in building lobbies, in the park, in the alley, in parked vehicles, and off the walls." It actually sounds like it might have been interesting (except for the skateboarding and puppets), had we been inclined to get dressed and go downstairs.

After six o'clock I checked the internet to see if I have jury duty tomorrow, but I don't.

§ **October 22.** Lucie and I walked down to the bank to get a foreign draft to send to the Potins, 540(the exchange rate is almost dead even, one euro per U.S. dollar). The teller sent us downstairs to another special teller where the bank vault is. The special teller kept helping other people while she was helping us; she'd say, "Fill this out," then disappear for ten minutes into the vault. Then she'd come back and take the form from us and start helping another person. It was taking forever, and when we complained, she said out loud to no one in particular, "...and I'm supposed to be on *lunch* now." I *almost* replied, "Well, we're spending our lunch hour down here, too," but

held my tongue. Afterwards we went by 630 Mason to see an apartment, but an elderly tenant out front told us they were a co-op and didn't allow pets.

While Lucie and I were walking to Powell Street Station she found a Paris Métro ticket on the ground—an omen! She caught the N and I went home to write, but ended up watching the film *Crumb* instead. I have never cared for the man's cartoons much but I otherwise find in him a kindred spirit. I do adore his portraits of '30s jazz and accordion musicians, however. At about 5:30 I left to meet Lucie. I took the 38 bus to Masonic, then waited almost an hour for the 43. I disembarked as soon as we got to Haight, forgetting the 43 turned left and went several blocks down Haight before turning on Carl; I could have thus stayed on the bus longer. I went into Amoeba to look for something by blues man Skip James, but ended up buying a new Yann Tiersen album, which I just happened to see on display.

After Lucie got off at 8:00 we walked to the Lucky Penny, where we had a unpleasant dining experience; we should have just gone to the Pinecrest. After dinner, we took the 38 home. On the way, Lucie and I were making each other laugh by making up fake product names, like candy bars called You Bet, Yes Way, or Oh Yeahs (that could be a cereal name). In the conversation about advertising in general that followed, I mentioned the local ice cream treat It's It. Several minutes later, when we were riding the lift in our building, a man got on with us who was eating an It's It.

I checked to see if I have jury tomorrow, which I do, at 9:30. I typed this while Lucie read; to bed at 10:15.

§ **October 23.** Got up at 6:00 to walk Lucie to CalTrain, then back home to write. Walked to the courthouse for jury duty at 9:30. I wasn't chosen, so I'm finished for the year. On the way back home I stopped in Lifetime Books (which used to be that "cat pee" bookstore) on Polk, then Kayo Books—I love that store but I can't believe they're still in business because I never see anyone in there.

When Lucie got home from work we watched Claude Chabrol's first film, *Le beau Serge*, which is said to be the first French New Wave film, but I doubt that. To bed at 9:30.

§ **October 24.** Got up at 9:00, then took the N with Lucie to Cole Valley, where we had a late breakfast at the boulangerie. After walking Lucie up the hill, I went to Amoeba to sell some albums. Took the 71 to 8th,

then walked home through the Tenderloin. For the rest of the afternoon, I cleaned up the apartment while listening to the new Yann Tiersen “double live” album, which is doubly delightful.

§ **October 25.** I slept one hour last night. At about 2:00 a.m., I suffered a sneezing fit, then I got a stuffy nose. Just as I felt like I could really go to sleep, the alarm went off.

Went to the post office to mail our payment for the house in France, a recording to that artist in Finland, and some rare books I had sold on eBay. Oh, and \$20 to a company in Sweden for an R. Crumb compilation of his “old-time favourites”. I don’t know what’s on it, but I hope it’ll be as satisfying as his other one, *That’s What I Call Sweet Music*.

After the post office I met my colleagues at the Pyramid Alehouse for another heavy, greasy lunch. I always regret eating there, today being no exception. There were too many of us, and I had to share a small table with five other people, including the colorless new gentleman. Returned to work at 2:45 and spent the rest of the afternoon fussing about with my computer, trying to get my e-mail to work again.

I picked up Lucie from CalTrain at 4:20, then we went to Trader Joe’s for groceries. They were playing a Smiths’ album, which was the first time I think I had ever shopped to music I liked; I had to smirk when “Shoplifters of the World Unite” came on; I looked around, wondering what I could swipe, but couldn’t make the effort due to laziness.

§ **October 26.** Lucie and I slept through our French class, then stayed at home all day doing not much of anything, listening to music, flipping channels, &c. Watched a decent film on Sundance called *West Beirut*. Later, I wrote an article for Lucie’s website on Paris, the only single piece of writing I think I have completed this year.

§ **October 28.** This morning I called Mother who told me Aunt Catherine came home last night to find a naked dead gentleman in her kitchen who had swallowed two bottles of aspirin. Throughout the entire investigation the police made the assumption the man lived there; my aunt had to convince them she had never seen him before. Later, Aunt Catherine found out her uncle or grandfather (I’m not sure which) had passed away early yesterday at church after singing a hymn.

§ **October 29.** Spent all day working; at 5:00 I took a crowded N to meet Lucie. As soon as I appeared, she said she wanted to sneak out early, so we did. On the way home we stopped for takeout from The Original Perfect Hamburger. While wolfing our food down like savages, we watched *Funny Games*, a recent Austrian film in which a family is terrorized in their vacation home by two psychopaths. It did *not* have a happy ending. I hope the same fate doesn't await Lucie and me while we're in France. While I was typing this the telephone rang. It was a robot, so I hung up on it.

§ **October 31.** Slept until 9:00, then Lucie and I walked to Whole Foods and to pay our tuition for French class. On the way there we beheld Klingons in drag, goth girls in fishnet hosiery, a baby with a pumpkin on its head, a baby Grim Reaper, a sexy witch, several prostitutes (real ones), a pimp (a fake one), and an overgrown Cub Scout. How I adore Hallowe'en; I wish people could wear fancy dress every day. Of course, Lucie and I never wear costumes because we're always too lazy. My idea for this year was to masquerade as "Count McDonald"—an undead Ronald McDonald with fangs, ghostly makeup, and a black instead of red cape.

After ham and butter sandwiches on baguettes, we watched the film *Balzac*. *Balzac* was three hours long, so when it was over it was time to cook dinner; Lucie roasted a chicken and made mashed potatoes while I kept her company and amused the cats. Later we watched part of *Vampyr: Der Traum des Allan Grey*, which looked entertaining but the subtitles were too intrusive, at times filling half the screen! Also, the edges of the screen were beveled, which I thought was corny. I want to rent the "DVD" so I can transfer the music to a "CD-R"; unlike many restored silent films, this one seemed to have intact its original score, which was ravishing and melancholy. To bed at 9:30.

I couldn't get to sleep because of the sounds of Hallowe'en celebrations, but after I finally did, Lucie and I both were awakened at 3:48 by a ranting maniac. I got out of bed to record him for my rant collection, but the display on my minidisc machine kept flashing "hold." I didn't want to turn on a light or look for the manual, so I gave up.

§ **November 5.** Lucie and I got up at 8:30, then walked around the corner to cast our votes. A few people were filling out their ballots but there was no line. Afterwards, I accompanied Lucie to Dr. Wolford's office. We

were early, so we ducked into Border's so we could look at Kurt Cobain's journal. It's really more a notebook of ideas than a personal journal, which was a bit disappointing.

After Lucie and I parted ways, I went home to work, stopping by the corner store for a can of tomato soup and a baguette. I had to log off the computer at noon so I could answer the telephone when the cable repairman arrived (sometime between noon and 4:00, I was told). He arrived at 1:15. He replaced our cable box, which we have used since we lived on Sutter St., and gave us a new, crisp remote. After the repairman left, I let the cats out of the bathroom; Loulou headed straight for the new cable box and sniffed it for a long time, then jumped onto the coffee table and sniffed the new remote control (which looks just like the old one – how does she *know*?).

I worked the rest of the afternoon while listening to Fauré. At 5:30 I started the VCR to record *The Virgin Suicides* then departed to meet Lucie at work. On the way home we stopped by Trader Joe's for some fruit and lettuce, then the corner store for cat litter. As we approached our building we saw a well-dressed Asian man jump out of a Lexus to purchase a copy of *Yank* magazine; his attempt at discretion was laughable; Lucie and I were staring right at him the whole time.

§ **November 8.** Another tempestuous day; after work I picked Lucie up from the train depot, then we drove out to the Sutro Baths to see the waves, said to be thirty to forty feet high. We were not disappointed. Waves were smashing into the cliffs, sloshing over the rocks and flooding the ruins below. On the way home we picked up some Thai food, then watched *Henry & June*, which I had seen when it first came out years ago but had since forgotten. It was a beautifully done film; Lucie and I both felt inspired after having seen it. I feel like reading Miller again, whom I had dismissed as a pornographer after reading *Opus Pistorum* in high school. I didn't know at the time that *Opus Pistorum* was a posthumous collection of dollar-a-page smut; I'll try *Tropic of Cancer* next.

§ **November 15.** It was rainy and windy, so I took the 38 to the bus station this morning. The bus was too warm (why is the *heater* always on, as if we live in Winnipeg?) and the windows were all steamed up. At Jones a black gentleman boarded the bus, singing, "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, a beautiful day in the neighborhood," etc., and saying to

everyone things like, “Won’t *you* be my neighbor?” and “Put on a *happy* face!” Everyone stared at their own feet to avoid his gaze. Nobody wants to be told to put on a happy face, especially when crammed into a steamy bus like so many lemmings.

Received a postcard from Louis, mailed from Cadaqués, where he and Catie went on holiday. He seems to have learned more French this last year than I have learned in the last twenty years, but of course that’s because he’s living in France.

§ **November 16.** Lucie and I arose at 6:30 to go to Le Boulangerie. This time we walked down Polk instead of over the hill; our enthusiasm for exercise appears to be on the wane (although Lucie still goes to the gymnasium).

In French class, Ken *m’a donné un cadeau*, a Harris tweed sport jacket he bought in college in the ’50s. It’s a tad snug (I think he said it was a 38; I’m a 42) but still essentially fits. I don’t know if I want to keep it, yet. He meant well, but I can’t help but feel the recipient of charity.

After class we had burritos for lunch followed by a three-hour nap; we later watched a Swiss film called *Messidor*, about two bored young girls who run away and get into much trouble. It was interesting to see the Swiss countryside, which I had assumed was more mountainous; instead, the region they were in consisted of gentle, rolling hills and farmland. I feel I understood the Swiss variety of French better than Parisian French; it was slower and peppered with Germanic words (one of the girls said *buchen* instead of *livre*).

§ **November 20.** At 6:40 this morning: “Excuse me, can I axe you for a favor?”

“No.”

“I haven’t axed the favor yet, asshole.”

At lunch I bought a special new notebook, a cheap fountain pen, and some colored pencils. I overdressed on what was an unusually warm day. There was some sort of birthday barbecue in the parking lot at work. I brought down a Chopin CD to bring to the event a crumb of elegance, not realizing until too late it had his B-flat minor sonata on it; when the funeral march began everyone grew silent and stared at their plates. Moments later Anton ran inside and put on Bob Marley.

When Lucie got home she gave me a haircut, then I washed my hair. Lucie cooked lima beans for dinner while we watched *Paris Was a Woman* (we missed the first thirty minutes), then *The Man Who Cried*.

§ **November 22.** The Emeryville market for luncheon; it was nearly noon, so there were long queues. I obtained shrimp rolls from the Vietnamese vendor, then took the only remaining seat at a wobbly plastic patio table near a giant television screen. It appeared to be the Fishing Channel; the program was the “Citgo Bassmaster Tournament Trail.” I had forgotten my book, so I thought, “What the Dickens, I’ll watch this and see what it’s all about.” Well, it was all about how many fish this one gentleman caught, what kind of bait he used, how fast his boat was – it was *shockingly* dull. I spilled Vietnamese sauce on my linen trousers. People around me were watching the commercials, which were about bait and boats and things, as if they were hypnotized. What a queer world!

After work I picked up Lucie from the train depot and we went to Bed, Bath and Beyond for a shower curtain and a trash can. Our old trash can’s foot-activated lid is malfunctioning. They didn’t have the exact shower curtain we wanted; we found a similar one, but it wasn’t quite right, somehow. They were all so offensive, really, I couldn’t believe people would put them in their bathrooms. I told Lucie I could obtain one Monday, in the East Bay somewhere, but in the end we decided on one. We saw a faux old-timey phonograph with a built-in compact disc player. The display model’s lid was broken and askew. The electronic control panel was unconvincingly designed to look like it was from the ’20s; the turntable was made of the cheapest plastic possible, even a child would turn his nose up at it. What a *dismal* piece of merchandise. We found a suitable trash can; all the lid liners were falling off, except for one, the one we bought. Sixty-six dollars for a shower curtain and trash can.

At Trader Joe’s it was nearly impossible to manoeuvre the cart through the mob. People see you coming but don’t move unless you ask them to, then they do it with this *look* on their faces, like you’ve asked them to give you a piggy-back ride. But Trader Joe’s is so cheap, cheaper than Whole Foods although their produce isn’t nearly as good. We wanted one zucchini but had to buy a shrink-wrapped eight-pack.

We found a miraculous parking spot in front of our building. We’ll move the car tomorrow morning on the way to French class. After unloading the

groceries, I went to the corner store to get barley for the soup; they didn't have any but Charlie said he could get some. The grocer at the store across the street didn't know what barley was; he had a blank look on his face as he repeated phonetically, "bar-lee?" In front of the building next door, right in the middle of the sidewalk, a homosexual gentleman was working out on a machine with Torso Track II written on top of it.

§ **December 4.** Slept badly; when I did manage to sleep I had unpleasant dreams in which I confronted my stepfather. It's the first time I've dreamt of him when that thin veneer of civility was absent, now replaced by open hostility; what began as my complete lack of acknowledgment of his presence in the room escalated into shouted insults and a frightening car chase. Curiously, in one scene his shady friends make an appearance in which there is an olfactory element—his friends smelled. I don't remember having ever smelled anything in a dream before.

We rode in the elevator this morning with a Russian trollop (does she live in our building or was she working?) who complemented Lucie on everything from her scent to her shoes. At the office this morning during a tremendous yawn, I unwittingly damaged a tooth, which is now unusually sensitive. I have made an appointment with Dr. Wu on the 17th, but I wonder if it can wait that long.

Luncheon at Emeryville market, after which I absentmindedly threw my plastic tray into the trash bin. I looked around to see if the tray ladies or anyone else had seen me, but no one had. When I returned to the office, there was a message from Paul, who has found the money to hire me again; I will now have three jobs, which means I'll have even less time for writing or *flânerie*. This year I have written nothing but a light essay on France, a false start on a novel, and this journal. I must remember Henry Miller didn't publish *Tropic of Cancer* until he was 43 (I'm 34, but a spring chicken).

§ **December 5.** Lots of interesting mail from Louis, Biber, and von Bunko. Louis sent me a short piece I wrote a few years ago about ants, which I had thought lost or destroyed. I haven't mailed George's letter because I haven't any stamps. Walked Lucie to the Muni station, then shopped for a leather satchel. I bought an ice cream cone and sat in Union Square, people watching, then went into Borders to see if they had a copy of Durrell's *The Black Book*, which no employee had heard of, but they did have Jean



Clair's book on Balthus which von Bunko had recommended. It was \$75, which I can't afford right now (property taxes are due, plus there is that black velvet jacket I saw at Nordstrom), but its dust-wrapper had been handled, anyway. Upon returning home, I spent the afternoon answering correspondence and listening to a disagreeable Nielsen symphony lent to me by Bruno while Mr. Darcy slept in my lap.

§ **December 11.** Tonight was the Company Holiday Party, at Olivetto's in Berkeley. After work Oliver and I took BART over; Lucie had arrived a half-hour earlier. Before we went into the restaurant, Lucie took me down the street to shew me a marble coffee table, then into a stationer's to shew me a lovely, little green notebook, which I immediately purchased. While waiting in line (the woman ahead of us was getting something gift wrapped), Lucie said to me, "I see what you mean about the East Bay," and the woman ahead of us turned and said, "What about it? Are we all just a bunch of *frumps* compared to you?" Lucie and I looked at each other and shrugged. Dinner was not our cup of tea, but I did drink more than I should have. Diane disappointed us by not saying anything foolish or putting her foot in her mouth or flirting with me or anyone else. At 11:00 Oliver, Randolphe, Herman, Lucie and I took BART home together. Randolphe was drunk and was cursing like a homosexual pirate; Herman recounted the sordid details of his and Randolphe's first date followed by several other "shocking" stories—"Do you want to hear another *shocking* story?"—about hairy Lesbians, "bear" parties, and his friends' sado-masochistic practices. To bed at midnight.

§ **December 12.** Woke up at 11:00 with the predictable hangover. I've finished *Black Spring*, which I didn't care for as much as *Tropic of Cancer*, and have started *Tropic of Capricorn*. Miller is such a great talker, and his books are like transcripts of his talking. Went to the library for an afternoon meeting, then took a packed N home, stopping at Anthropolgie to look at the kittens. Soup for dinner while watching *Beyond the Forest*. Afterwards, while Lucie answered letters I flipped through a stack of old *Photoplay* magazines. To bed at 10:00, exhausted.

§ **December 15.** I have somehow completely botched my awful <http://dord.s5.com> Dord website. It's a boring, idiotic disaster which will take much patience to correct, some other time but not tonight—*j'en ai assez!*

I don't record anymore nor do I care what happens to the two or three extant recordings of which I am not embarrassed. If I could find a new record label for them I could then forget about them forever.

# Chapter 5

## 2003

§ **January 1.** Last night the dame from 815 woke us up three times by slamming her door. The third time, I stuck my head out the door and saw her walking down the hall. She was wearing pink satin hot pants which said “Juicy Bitch” across her buttocks in glittering letters.

Do you have a *problem?*” she demanded, after pressing the elevator button with one of her crowbar-like hooker fingernails.

I was just wondering what all the excitement was about. I heard a door slamming...” I replied.

It was *my* door and I didn’t *slam* it,” she shrieked, shaking her head side to side sassily. “You need to get *over* it,” she added, no doubt in reference to a note I had left on her door a few weeks ago asking her to please shut her door more quietly. Later during the night she slammed her door a few more times, deliberately loudly in defiance of all manners and common sense. This morning I left another note for Philip, who has already warned the Juicy Bitch’s landlord about his errant tenant.

§ **January 3.** Sitting in an aeroplane for ten hours tests one’s limits of sanity and physical endurance. As soon as we were in the air, the gentleman in front of me flung his seat backwards violently, hitting me in the mouth. At the same time, I felt two pointed knees press into the small of my back. Lucie managed to close her eyes, but I can never get any shut-eye on an aeroplane. I tried to pass the time by reading *Le Figaro*, then the preface

to *Lost Illusions*. However, I was so uncomfortable and distracted I couldn't concentrate on anything, so I decided to watch a movie. In the armrest there was a remote control bound to it by a cord; I tried to pull it out but it was stuck, the cord was bunched up around one side of the remote, wedging it in place. I gave it a final, hard yank; just then everyone's picture screens went black. Moments later the pilot apologized for the malfunction, and soon after that everything came back on again. I don't doubt that I was the one who was responsible. Apart from an incident where my knee knocked a cup of water out of its cup holder and into my lap, the flight was uneventful but terribly unpleasant, as usual, with its crying babies, restless, fidgeting passengers, the snoring gentleman, the old woman and her constant blanket problem, the kid with his noisy electronic gadget, the people behind me mashing down on the back of my seat every time they got up and again upon returning, the fake, dry air, the nauseating turbulence, and long lines to the water closet.

It was snowing sideways when we landed at Charles de Gaulle; by the time we arrived into the city on the RER there were several inches of snow on the ground. Georges met us at the apartment at 47, rue du Four, turning over to us the keys and instructing us in his usual thorough manner on how to use the stove, turn on the heat, operate the cable television, empty the trash, &c. The apartment itself was a one-bedroom on the première étage (second floor) of a late nineteenth-century building with creaky oak parquet floors and an asymmetrical floor plan, and views of what amounted to a large light shaft. It was comfortably furnished but the lack of rugs made it seem a bit cold and barren.

As soon as Georges left we raced to the Jardin du Luxembourg only to find its gates locked. People were out and about, throwing snowballs, laughing, and catching snowflakes on their tongues. We walked around for a while then went into a café crowded with young people smoking, drinking coffee, and engaged in deep philosophical conversations. I couldn't help noticing the colorful socks of a young man seated nearby; they were patterned in the style of Mondrian and made of silk. After finishing our tea we went to Franprix for groceries, then went home and had gnocchi and *ballons de boeuf* in a tomato sauce for dinner. To bed at 7:00, exhausted.

§ **January 4.** Line 10 of the Métro runs directly beneath our apartment, causing the dishes to rattle and a table to inch across the floor. It kept me awake at first, but I soon grew used to its dull rumble. We got up early and went to the *marché bio* on the bd. Raspail for dried sausages, clemen-

tines, thyme, black, fuzzy fresh goat cheese shaped like a fig, and a *galette des rois*, a pastry eaten this time of the year to celebrate the Day of the Kings, or *l'Épiphanie*. The treat comes with a paper crown and has a little toy baked inside; the person who finds the toy wears the crown and becomes king for the day. Lucie found the prize, a plastic rectangle which said 'TGV' on it. Despite the ice and bitter cold, the market was teeming with activity. Some vendors had heat lamps to keep their lettuce from freezing. After a few purchases it is apparent to me that the French aren't used to the euro yet. They all stare at the coins, counting and re-counting them, mumbling numbers and making frequent mistakes. The two-cent coin to me looks like a twenty-cent piece because it has a numeral two next to a small globe which resembles a zero. Because the euro is approximately the same value as the U.S. dollar, it's as if a veil of mystery has been lifted; I can now see at a glance how much things cost without having to divide by 6.5. A *clochard* asked me for an euro; when I ignored her, as I do at home, she demanded to know if I were deaf! To bed at 8:00 after watching a documentary on Serge Gainsbourg. Besides his early jazz efforts, Gainsbourg's music is to me exceptionally corny, although he is capable of fine lyrics. The French seem to be much more interested in what a popular song is about rather than the music itself, although this wasn't always true.

§ **January 5.** Up at 6:00 on this dark and crystalline morning. The Seine is overflowing its banks, which a waiter told me is not uncommon this time of the year. Walked through the Tuileries, which was deserted and frozen; I felt like we were the only people in Paris, but for an occasional jogger. Presently, we could make out in the distance the myriad brake lights of bankers, stockbrokers, lawyers, and secretaries headed for La Defence. Lucie and I zig-zagged to the Musée Fragonard, which had an *orgue de parfumeur* similar to that of Huysmans' Des Esseintes. The rows upon rows of 19th-century bottles, arrayed upon an antique three-sided cabinet of oak, did in fact resemble the pipes of a small organ. Nearby in a glass display case, the glands of a *castor* hung like two flabby, dried prunes. After tea at a Moroccan café it started to snow again lightly. We ducked into a covered passage where I found in a little bookstore the book *Le nu de Rops à Delvaux* for 10. Most of the plates are in black and white, but books on Rops or Delvaux are uncommon at home so I just had to have it. After buying our train tickets for Dunkerque at the Gare du Nord, we walked down the rue St-Denis where the *cocottes* (downright *alluring* by Polk Street standards) stood in doorways

wearing little under long and sumptuous fur coats.

*Entrecôte frites* at a café called La Direction, crowded with local blue-collar workers washing their long luncheons down with cognac. After finishing our meal, we went to the Pompidou for the Max Beckmann exhibition, which was really very good, although we ran out of steam toward the end; I don't think Lucie cares for Beckmann – too *German*. A visit to a jammed Monoprix on the way home; the Tour St-Jacques is still covered in scaffolding—I realize I have never seen it without. Dinner, then to bed at 9:00.

§ **January 6.** Bounced out of bed at six o'clock. The hot water heater in the kitchen is malfunctioning, so Georges stopped by to take a look. Delphine said Amar doesn't get off work on Saturday until 3:00, so we took the Métro to the Gare du Nord to change our tickets. Since we were in the area, we walked through a marginal neighborhood to the place de l'Assommoir to pay homage to Zola, but there was no trace of Gervaise's laundry, not even a plaque (although Paris is already sagging under the weight of countless plaques). We had thought this was where the novel *L'Assommoir* was to have taken place, but if so, my, how things have changed. We next went to the Musée Gustav Moreau only to find its doors locked—closed on Tuesdays!—which we had forgotten. Lucie wanted to buy a particular brand of special French deodorant so we popped into a Monoprix near the place Blanche. After we quit the building, Lucie looked up and suddenly exclaimed, "This is where the Cabaret de l'Enfer was!" I had known it was now a grocery store, but forgot exactly where the legendary club used to stand. There is no plaque.

At the Musée de la vie romantique, a foul-tempered woman let us in for free, muttering about what a *mauvais* day it was. We saw a lock of George Sand's hair and an alabaster cast of the hand of Chopin, we scurried off to the Musée de Montparnasse to see the La Ruche exhibit, where we saw some nice Soutines (although I generally do not care for him) and a really amazing toilet in the style of Oriental blue and white porcelain (not part of the general collection). It said something clever on it, but I failed to record it in my notebook and have forgotten it. Luncheon at the pleasant Odessa Café, where we sat near two gay Americans who were talking loudly in English *about* their portable telephones, holding them up and admiring them, testing the various ringers, and so on. Onion soup for Lucie, a panini for me.

Lucie knew Jean-Pierre Léaud's address somehow, so we walked down

the bd. Edgar Quinet hoping we'd casually bump into him, with no success. When we got home the olive oil we had bought this morning in sub-freezing temperatures had warmed up and blown its cork across the apartment. While flipping channels on the picture box, we saw a dubbed version of the "Six Million Dollar Man," which in French is called "L'Homme qui valait trois milliard." Why only *three* million, I don't know, unless they're talking about francs, in which case he would be worth a little over \$46,000, quite a cut-rate hero, if you ask me.

§ **January 7.** Up at 8:30. The upstairs neighbors were moving until late last night, and they were at it again at 7:00 this morning, slamming doors, dragging enormous armoires across the floor, and making a tremendous din. After breakfast, we went to the *rive droite* where Lucie found three splendid dresses at a boutique called Diggi. *La vendeuse* was charming; we talked about music (she was playing a Baroque disc, Caldara, I think), travel (she had seen all of India), and ourselves. Lucie tried a form-fitting dress, saying it might look better on someone less voluptuous; the *vendeuse* remarked, "It would be *sad* if there were nothing there" (pointing to Lucie's *derrière*), and later, "It would be a *pity* if you were smaller" (gesturing at Lucie's breasts). Afterwards, we walked down the street to the Galerie Michelle Boulet to see the paintings of Jacques Resch, which were sort of a pastiche of Bosch, Dalí, and Magritte, but with modern subject matter such as McDonald's garbage, circuit boards, and television sets. The Musée Gustav Moreau was almost overwhelming; despite its relatively small size, the collection included dozens of cabinets filled with small paintings, drawings, and studies. We spent several hours there, but didn't see half the collection. The only photographs I have taken so far have been of discarded Christmas trees.

§ **January 8.** Up at 7:00; it's the coldest day yet, with a high of only -6°. Métro to the 16e to visit the Maison Balzac. Afterward, we looked for the *vespasienne* (a once ubiquitous public urinal) at the place Barcelone, but it had been replaced by a modern, coin-operated toilet. We wandered around the neighborhood, admiring the art déco and art nouveau architecture, as well as more than an occasional Guimard-designed building. After the best *tarte aux framboises* I naturally have ever eaten, we went to the Musée de la ville de Paris to see the Picabia exhibit, which to my knowledge was the largest ever, including most of his entire *oeuvre* of paintings, drawings, magazines,

even a showing of the delightful film *Entr'acte*, which Lucie and I sat through twice.

§ **January 9.** Georges called and said he can't get a repairman for the hot water heater until Monday, so he offered us another apartment. It's in an 18th-century building at 63, quai de la Tournelle. The apartment is huge, with sagging timbered ceilings and a postcard view of Notre Dame. As we have accumulated additional baggage since our arrival, the walk from the old apartment to the new was not a pleasant one. For some reason, it never occurred to us we could have taken a taxi.

While Lucie took advantage of the larger bathtub, I sat in the window and watched the people strolling by, trying to think up schemes whereby we could stay in Paris forever. *Flânerie* along the bd. St-Germain, then to a little diner called Cluny Stop for a late luncheon of steak frites and a banana split (made with Berthillon ice cream!). As I descended to the toilettes, I hit my head on the low ceiling. A girl asked if I was alright, whereby I knocked on my head and responded, "*C'est dur*," which made her chuckle. The men's toilette turned out to be no more than a glorified *trou*; after I left the girl went in after me. The women's toilette was twenty cents, so I guess she wanted to save money.

§ **January 11.** Up at 6:00; Métro to Gare du Nord, then the TGV to Dunkerque. North of Paris there was still much snow on the ground. The train moved swiftly and silently over the countryside, passing through Arras, Lens, Bethune, then Hazebrouck; slag heaps from nearby mines dotted the landscape, reminding one of Zola's *Germinal*, which was set in this region, I think. Inside the train passengers read quietly, slept, or made themselves invisible. There are special rooms for portable telephone use, but no one seems to need to use them, as speaking in quiet voices comes naturally here. It's difficult not to compare this tranquility to the raucous experience of CalTrain.

Delphine picked us up from the station, then gave us a whirlwind tour of the Pas de Calais coastline, including Cap Blanc-Nez and Cap Griz-Nez. We braced ourselves against the howling Arctic wind, staring across La Manche at the chalk-white cliffs of Dover. Delphine said we were lucky, that one can't normally see all the way across the channel due to the constant *brouillard*. After exploring several ice-filled Nazi bunkers (in one of which I found a cache



of burned papers with codes on them) and walking until our faces were nearly frostbitten, we returned to the car and sped towards Belgium at speeds which would have impressed Mario Andretti. Delphine, who curses in English like a swashbuckler, wanted to know more American curses, so we taught her how to say “haul ass,” “bite me,” and “hogwash” as well as the subtle yet crucial difference between “This is *the* shit” and “This is *shit*.” Suddenly, Delphine blurted, “We are in Belgium now!” I was surprised because there wasn’t a border station or so much as a “Welcome to Belgium” sign. I did, however, notice a sudden increase in the number of bicyclists, as well as a proliferation of signs in English. After coffee and ice cream at a tacky fern bar called The Oasis, we went back to Delphine’s apartment in St-Malo-les-Bains, situated on the beach in an environment which reminded me a little of an ice age Venice Beach. Amar was in the midst of preparing dinner for us. He speaks little English; after a couple of hours I felt like I had exhausted my entire French vocabulary on him, finding excuses to use words such as *fosseyeur*, *seringue*, and *marteau de forgeron*. At dusk Delphine drove us back to the train station, where we *almost* missed the train, which pulled away the moment we boarded. During the trip home Lucie and I discussed the “last man on earth” theme for a novel—quodidian concerns of what to eat, where to live, disposal of garbage, cleanliness, loneliness, and so on.

Gare du Nord at night is quite a different place than it is during the day, crowded with shady-looking characters from some third-world crime novel. To bed at 10:00.

§ **January 12.** It was a freezing but sunny day; the *bouquinistes* were open, so I ran across the street and bought a few magazines from the '30s with titles like *Allô* and *Paris Magazine*, some old postcards, and a Brahms album from an old chap with whom I spent an hour talking about classical music. After a quick breakfast of tea and clementines, Lucie and I took the train to Émile Zola’s house, located in the attractive suburb of Médan. The house itself was a thirty minute walk from the station, down a long, straight, ice-covered road. Lucie and I lingered before several handsome houses, imagining ourselves living there before departing with a heavy sigh. The guided tour was given in French and seemed interminable; Lucie and I sneaked out before our long-winded guide made it to the Dreyfus Affair. The train home was crowded, full of illegitimate-looking people; I stuffed my wallet down the front of my rhinohide pants while Lucie clutched her purse tightly to her breast. Dinner at home; to bed at 9:30.

§ **January 13.** Up at 8:30; tea and clementines for breakfast. On the way to Parc Monceau, we rode an antique wooden escalator while transferring at La Motte-Piquet Grenelle. At the park we saw a man jogging in a sweater vest and tie. The pond was frozen; ducks were skidding across the ice, while others were busy pushing pieces of bread around, quacking. We encountered a flock of school children in color-coded sashes, chirping and rolling about in the dirt like so many sparrows. Their teacher called out to them, “Petits lous!” and soon they were gone.

The unexpected highlights of our visit to the Musée Jacquemart-André were a couple of Kislings and Foujitas. After a brief snack at the museum café, we walked down the rue Faubourg St-Honoré to the Librairie Chrétien, where we kept the proprietor busy showing us books, magazines, and drawings. He remembered the wooden girl we had purchased some years before, but I don’t think he remembered us.

We watched *Blue Velvet* on the picture box, which made me feel proud to be an American. However, it was dubbed; Lucie and I had to laugh when Frank Booth shouted, “Heineken? C’est de la *merde*! Pabst Blue Ribbon!”

§ **January 14.** This morning I said “mercé” instead of “merci” to a gendarme after asking directions to a Métro station located directly behind us. Lucie and I searched for what must be the last *vespasienne* in Paris on the bd. Arago near the Santé prison. It was there! It was a rather plain model and a bit rusty, but I relieved myself with much gusto as Lucie documented the event from across the street. As another gentleman joined me, I wondered if he took this romantic remnant of a bygone era, this simple pleasure, for granted, for tomorrow it may be replaced with a soulless, coin-operated machine.

At the Cimetière de Montparnasse we saw Baudelaire’s grave and that of Huysmans, upon which someone had recently placed a bit of an orange—an homage of sorts or merely litter? Serge Gainsbourg’s tombstone was covered with cabbages, roses, cigarette butts, and Métro tickets, all references to his song lyrics.

People keep asking Lucie and I if we are English; I guess our accents aren’t as obvious as I had thought, but certainly they’re not British. When we reply, “No, we’re from San Francisco,” they perk up, as if we had said Oz. Luncheon at La Coupole for our first really intimidating meal in Paris. The menu was difficult; not only did we not recognize half the entrées, but

it was not possible to tell exactly what made a “meal” due to the variety of sections, boxes, and columns. There were more staff than diners, and I didn’t know to which ones we were allowed to speak. In the end we ordered something simple, but I spilled *moutarde* on my new corduroy coat, while Lucie dragged her sleeve through gravy.

After lunch I found a wonderful wool coat on the rue Bréa (steps away from where Alice Prin, Queen of Montparnasse, collapsed and died nearly fifty years ago, which I acknowledged by removing my hat) on sale for half as much as I paid for the ruined corduroy coat, then an English tweed satchel from a shop on the rue du Dragon. Lucie bought some salmon and gold damask curtains on sale, using specialized vocabulary she had learned in advance for the occasion: *rideaux, anneaux, tringles, fronceurs*. On the way home through St-Germain we stopped in Shakespeare & Co., which, despite being but a weak shadow of the real Shakespeare & Co., is still a decent English-language bookstore by any standard.

§ **January 15.** At the crack of dawn eight men in aqua jumpsuits in three aqua SECO trucks arrived with their aqua power generator; by 10:15 one of the men had started jackhammering while the others watched and pointed, or wrote things on clipboards. Breakfast outdoors at a café in the place des Vosges; despite the chilly weather, we were quite comfortable under a flaming heat lamp. The art déco table we had wanted to buy a couple of years ago was still in a nearby shop window. The Englishwoman who runs the shop had balked at the idea of shipping it to us; she procrastinated for two weeks until we finally gave up. We should make her another offer, half of what we agreed upon last time.

The Maison Victor Hugo I found *absolutely fabulous*; first of all, I had no idea the old man could paint, and boy, *could* he! His watercolours and ink drawings were exquisitely weird for their time, pre-dating the Surrealists by almost half a century. How is it I have never known of them? Hugo was also a fine interior decorator; many of the rooms retained their original appearance behind a velvet cord; I could only stand and gape idiotically like a child at the circus. I’ve yet to find a decent biography of the man, although I believe Graham Robb has written one; I must locate a copy upon our return.

Luncheon on the rue Turenne at a place which serves horse burgers. I will partake of a cow if I don’t dwell on it, but I will *not* eat horse, not even to satisfy my curiosity. After purchasing some old hôtel silver from an argenterie on the rue Necker, we went into the Renaissance palace of

the Musée Carnavalet, which, despite the disappointing closure of its 20th-century wing (we didn't get to see the facsimile of Proust's bedroom), was much larger than we had anticipated. By dusk Lucie and I were two tired rats, gorged on *camembert*, trying to find our way out of an infinitely complex but not entirely unpleasant maze. However, it will be some time before I wish to see another piece of porcelain.

The men in aqua are gone, but they have left behind a deep *trou* in the ground. *Dinde* and eggplant ravioli for dinner; to bed at 10:30.

§ **January 16.** Up at 9:30. Lucie wanted to rest, so I went out in search of cardboard boxes. At home, I'd know what to do—I'd look in Dumpsters behind bookstores, but here there are no Dumpsters. What do the French do with their garbage? I ended up going to the Bricomonge for the boxes, as well as tape and a marker. We packed two large boxes with the curtains, excess clothing, books, gifts, that special French deodorant Lucie is hoarding, &c., and I hauled them to the post office one at a time. They were so expensive to mail one would think I was sending them to Pluto. Before I returned home I stopped into the Librairie Les Autodidactes where I found Foujita's *catalogue raisonné* in two fat tomes, used at half the retail price. The proprietor tried to convince me to drag them home on the plane, but in the end he agreed to mail them—even with the steep postage, I saved a lot of money. For dinner I brought home a pizza, which was really not very good; later, I ate a bag of Old El Paso tortilla chips and Champion brand salsa while watching a silly variety show called “Le Bigdil.”

§ **January 17.** Up at 10:30. Explored St-Germain; Lucie bought a fancy antique umbrella at a special umbrella store. Bought several art books at a nearby bookstore, which I had mailed home for a small fortune. Luncheon at our favorite café, La Palette, right out of a Jean Rhys novel—what I wouldn't give for a La Palette at home! Afterwards, we went into Deyrolles, which has changed a little bit; they now sell things like hats, aprons, and gardening spades in addition to boar heads, stuffed cattle and foxes. Mariage Frères for “tea of the solitary poets.” Later, we sought three residences of Huysmans, one at 11, rue de Sèvres, once the remains of a vast monastery but now a non-descript series of apartment buildings, remodeled to suppress its ecclesiastical style. The second residence was at 11, rue Suger, now number 9. The “round-headed double door painted green and studded with nails” no longer exists, but there *was* a plaque. The last, at 38, rue

St-Sulpice, was where the family lived until Huysmans' father died and his mother remarried.

§ **January 18.** Up at 8:00. We packed our things, then took the Métro to the St-Sulpice Avis. Drove back to our apartment in a lime green Renault Twingo. I double-parked so we could load the car, speeding away just as a *flic* had pulled up behind us. The dashboard thermometer read 0°; visibility was less than a couple of blocks due to thick fog and drizzle. Soon we were cruising along on the A11, where we were practically the only car on the road. Luncheon at an off-ramp cafeteria called L'Arche. My steak haché was served kicking and screaming; I worried about becoming ill, but reasoned that this is how it is normally eaten. A couple of hours later we had checked into the Hôtel Vêndome and were exploring the town of Vêndome on foot, which was completely deserted. We were befriended by an elderly woman who insisted upon showing us the canal and gardens while repeating how old, bored, and lonely she was. Brief words were exchanged with the village idiot; after he went away the woman explained that he was *fou*. After parting ways, Lucie and I continued up the hill to the ruins of the château, a wall of which had recently collapsed in a pile of debris and was now covered in an enormous blue tarpaulin. At dusk the town suddenly came alive; the streets were teeming with teenagers in "flappy" pants, a style which seems not to exist in Paris nor anywhere else in the world that I know of. A bar advertised a *grosses poitrine* contest—to see who has the biggest breasts in the region; inside was an old *moulin d'eau* under which ran part of the canal.

Sandwiches, tarts, and wine for dinner in our hotel room, all for less than 12! The beds are appalling; mine lists at twenty degrees like a sinking dinghy, while Lucie's was concave, like a taco shell. I fell upon mine and tumbled off the other side in what must have made a hilarious sight gag. While Lucie howled in the alternately freezing and scalding bath, I dragged my mattress onto the floor and tried to get comfortable. To bed at ten o'clock after my own miserable bath and a documentary on the history of 20th-Century Fox. As I lay on my mattress, the silence punctuated by the occasional roar of a motorcycle or drunken laughter (from the big boob contest?), I realized I hadn't thoroughly rinsed the conditioner from my hair.

§ **January 19.** Up at 8:00; it's much warmer, but rainy and windy. After tea at a nearby café, we went to the flea market, where Lucie found an antique lace tablecloth and I found an old postcard of the Cabaret du Néant

in Paris which I had seen in a book, depicting a man in a coffin on a stage before a crowd of onlookers.

By noon we had pulled up to Le Domaine du Cafard, a seventeenth-century farm outside the town of Loches. The gate was chained but unlocked; Lucie got out of the car, unhooked the chain, opened the gate so I could drive in, shut the gate, replaced the chain, &c., all in the stormy weather. As we approached the main house, several muddy dogs appeared and surrounded our Twingo, howling and snarling. A woman appeared at the door; it was Madame Potin. She ushered the dogs away, then led us on foot to our house some fifty yards away. Madame Potin, or Christine, gave us the keys and showed us around, but had to rush back to the main house to watch her toddlers. We are invited to the Potin's tomorrow evening for drinks.

We drove into Loches for luncheon but the town seemed literally uninhabited. Christine had recommended the Restaurant George Sand, but entrées started at 22; as we merely wanted a quick bite, we ended up eating some wretched little meat pies from a nearby pâtisserie as we drove towards Chenonceaux. In one of the canals flanking the long driveway of the château we saw a black swan inching slowly across the thin ice; with each step the ice creaked and but did not break. Nearby, its mate was busily arranging her eggs upon a tall mound of dead leaves. Like every place outside of Paris in January, the château was completely deserted; Lucie and I had the whole château to ourselves.

From Chenonceaux we wandered across the countryside until we happened upon a partially ruined castle overlooking a village called Montrésor. We drove up the hill and through the castle gate, where we were met by the groundskeeper. He said the château was closed for the season, but we were welcome to explore the gardens and Gothic ruins, which offered us a panoramic view of the medieval village below. Later, we walked down the ancient narrow, winding streets admiring everything in sight. On the way back to the car we saw a nutria shambling slowly across the road and disappear behind a crumbling, Gothic barn. I wondered if I would recognize nutria on a menu; I don't think I would care to eat one.

Back at Le Cafard, Lucie prepared an excellent meal of pasta and home-made tomato sauce from ingredients left behind from previous lodgers. Meanwhile, I built a fire in the fireplace using old motorcycle magazines and children's art found behind the divan. Soon, it roared nearly out of control; we feared the house would burn down. I caught five spiders and threw them into the garden while Lucie screamed hysterically. It was a blustery evening;

black clouds raced across a nearly full moon as the trees swayed and moaned in the breeze. After dinner, Lucie and I rearranged the cheap Ikea furniture, hiding some of the more unsightly pieces in a remote bedroom while listening to a Glenn Gould album someone left behind. The two-story fin-de-siècle house is unusual in that it is filled with marble—marble floors, marble wainscoting, marble countertops, marble mantelpieces, marble of every conceivable variety, which makes the place feel not unlike a mausoleum. The plastic (not marble!) toilet seat is cracked; it pinched my bottom, drawing blood—a damned nuisance!

§ **January 20.** Up at 10:00; a dark, blustery day. Lucie and I explored the *cit   medievale* of Loches, the ch  teau and its donjon, &c. *Loches est mort*. Most everything is closed and shuttered; the entire town seems to have been deserted. Panini for luncheon at the p  tisserie, followed by shopping at an immense grocery store on the outskirts of town called E. Leclerc, which also sells cheap clothing, tools, housewares, gardening supplies, &c. When we returned home hours later, the dishwasher, which had been so difficult to figure out how to start, was still running and we couldn't figure out how to make it quit.

It had started to rain, so rather than walk through the mud in complete darkness we drove the 200 meters to the Potin's house. Christine had to work late, so we spent the evening with her husband, Thierry. He told us our house was built in 1899; the owner had made his fortune in the marble business, hence all the marble. We asked Thierry about the workmen we had seen at a nearby building; he told us he was going to open a *discoth  que* which people could rent for private parties; he would be the DJ. We also asked him about the gate to the property; he laughed and said to use the other entrance a half kilometer down the road, which we hadn't been told about. He also told us a story about how he had heard a cow coughing which sounded exactly like a human coughing. After an hour and a half, we excused ourselves because Lucie had left dinner in the oven. As expected, our beds are terrible; Lucie's was divided up the middle by a raised section of the wooden frame, which she dealt with by sleeping sideways. I placed my spongy mattress on the floor, which offered some stability, but not nearly enough for a good night's sleep.

§ **January 21.** Up at 10:00; the sun has come out. With aching backs and limbs, we drove to Chambord, where, besides the woman who sold us the tickets and two men on horseback, we saw not another human being.

After thoroughly exploring the château, with its mind-blowing “double-helix” staircase, we headed towards Blois, arriving at rush hour to a surprising amount of traffic just as it had started to rain violently. We decided it was not worth the trouble to park and walk around, so we turned around and went back to the house.

After the rain stopped the skies cleared and were filled with brilliant stars. While I was in the bath and Lucie was cooking dinner, the electricity went out. Drove down the lane to the Potins, whose power was out, too. There was no sign of Thierry or Christine, but her father was there; he gave us some candles and told us Thierry was working on the problem. Back at the house, while waiting for the lights to come back on, we sat outside and looked at the stars and listened to the wind in the trees while drinking violet liqueur. *Hachis parmentier* for dinner; to bed at midnight.

§ **January 22.** Up at 9:00; leftovers and oranges for breakfast. The combination washer and dryer had run all night but never stopped, so our clothes were still wet. We drove to the château at Chinon, on a bluff overlooking the Vienne; here I explored several forbidden staircases and tunnels under the château while Lucie stood guard. At Azay-le-Rideau we saw a double rainbow over the château; Lucie took a photograph, which I suggested would make a fine postcard. On the way there and back, we stopped frequently to investigate troglodyte dwellings, monolithic monuments, and lesser châteaux and ruins.

*Steak à l'estragon* with *pommes de terres au gratin* for dinner; we had almost given up on trying to figure out how to turn on the oven. All the appliances here are troublesome; the manuals are in French, of course, but the directions are vague and counterintuitive. Wildlife seen today: *une blaireau*, *un chat*, *un chien*.

§ **January 23.** Up at 9:00; last night we were awakened by a screech owl, which I don't believe I have ever heard but was nevertheless able to recognize as such. It was a cold, gray day. We set off across the countryside to see more châteaux, graveyards, churches, <http://www.dontlets.com/012303.htm> dolmens, and villages. Near Sennevières we spotted a château which was partially in ruins; the groundskeeper let us look around as long as we didn't go inside. When it was time to leave, we discovered the driveway was blocked by a funny little truck; the groundskeeper was nowhere to be found, so we



played with two puppies while we waited.

In our zeal for discovery, we later entered what we thought was a castle. A man asked us quizzically who we were looking for; when we said we wanted to see the château, he replied, “This is a school.” Spaghetti for dinner, during which the power went out again. Fortunately, we had built a tremendous fire, so light was not a problem.

§ **January 24.** Up at 8:00; by 8:30 we had peeled out in the muddy driveway and were speeding towards Paris. *Petit déjeuner* of tartines, yogurt, and orange juice at the roadside L’Arche. After returning the car under St-Sulpice, we checked into the Hôtel Recamier around the corner. We spent our last day in Paris sitting around in cafés and wandering around; Lucie returned to a boutique on the rue Jacob to buy an art déco bracelet she had seen last week. As we were leaving, Daniel Auteuil squeezed past us on the narrow sidewalk. He was with an attractive woman his age, perhaps his wife or a lover; moments later they hailed a taxi. There was no mistake about his identity, as I had also heard him speak, recognizing his voice immediately. I scanned the faces of passersby to see their reaction, but nobody appeared to recognize Auteuil, or if they did, they were discreet about it.

An enormously satisfying dinner at Au Bon St-Pourçain on the rue Servandoni, just around the corner from our little hotel. I had the *compote de lapereaux*, while Lucie had a shrimp salad; for our entrée we both had the *poulet à l’estragon*, which compared favourably to Lucie’s at home. To bed at eleven o’clock. Lucie saw a cat in a neighbor’s window; when she spoke to it, he jumped into our room. The friendly orange cat smelled all our belongings before letting us pet him, then Lucie played “the thing under the blanket” with him. When his owner appeared at the window and gave a signal, the cat leapt away. We think he probably does this often.

§ **January 25.** Up at 5:30. Despite the sound of a distant stereo and a barking dog(!), Lucie and I had slept very well in the narrow but comfortable beds. We took a taxi to the airport. Euro-dogs, Crocky brand chips “à l’ancienne” and Coca-Colas for breakfast. While waiting for our flight, we saw Karolina Kurkova, VH-1’s “Model of the Year” boarding a flight to New York. We couldn’t remember her name, so we went into the newsstand, where her face was on two magazine covers. I later thought I saw Tom Arnold, but I was mistaken. They made Lucie check her special antique

umbrella; I have no hope it will survive the journey intact.

§ **January 27.** One of the first sights which greeted us upon arrival home was a refrigerator filled with feces abandoned at the corner of O'Farrell and Leavenworth; nearby, it appeared that a large garbage bomb had been detonated. Immediately noticeable, in contrast to France, are the proliferation of car alarms (I had heard none in France), homeless people, and constant jungle music. For the first time this month, I feel tense; I also feel unsafe. Lucie's umbrella arrived slightly bent.

§ **January 29.** Lucie and I are both enormously depressed about where we live; the culture shock upon our return home was almost more than we could bear. San Francisco seems uninhabitable, a hell-hole of filth, crime, vandalism, and poverty, a cultural backwater, a miasma of anti-intellectualism, poor manners, and bad taste. America and Americans seem completely stupid and vulgar. Oh, if we could only live in France! But how?

§ **February 1.** Lucie and I were awakened at three o'clock by a raucous crowd of inconsiderate young people down in the parking lot of the building next door; the laugh of one girl in particular was shrill enough to shatter crystal. After shouting, "Would you please lower your voices" twice to no effect, I began hurling pots of yogurt at them, which exploded upon the walls above their heads. The girl shrieked, "I'm calling the *police* you motherfuckers!" Moments later two officers arrived, who made the group go inside.

§ **February 2.** Fleeing to France is not a solution to our problems; Lucie and I are Americans, and nothing will ever change that. What we need is to focus on what we like about America. Lucie and I have drawn up lists; here's mine so far (in no particular order): Edgar Allan Poe, Dairy Queen, *The Shining*, Woody Allen, porch swings, Theodore Dreiser, California bungalows, "I Love Lucy," flappers, The Cramps, Bix Beiderbecke, tornadoes, Heifetz at Carnegie Hall, Busby Berkeley's "close-up" girls, *Sunset Boulevard*, Christina Ricci, produce stands, Rudy Vallée and his Connecticut Yankees ("Heigh *ho*, everybody!"), Turner Classic Movies, Laurel & Hardy, Fourth of July picnics, Living Stereo, tumbleweeds, Bing Crosby, Edward Hopper, Carlsbad Caverns, cheesy roadside attractions, Cap'n Jack &

Scully on KFJC, Fats Waller at the organ, the Stanford Theater, Ukulele Ike, Doo Rag, The Horrors, pre-code Hollywood, Johnny Hamp's Kentucky Sere-naders, the Coon-Sanders Orchestra, Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra, Guy Maddin (alright, so he's Canadian), Leonard Bernstein, *The Great Gatsby*, Bette Davis, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, garage sales, Vincent Price, *Paper Moon*, David Lynch, Vincent Gallo, Howard Johnson's, the 1959 Cadillac Coupe de Ville, drive-in movie theaters, snow cones, Jadeite glassware, ghost towns, *Gone with the Wind*, the Sundance Film Festival, Jean Harlow, the Empire State Building, cheeseburgers and chili dogs, Milton Bradley, H. P. Lovecraft, "Leave it to Beaver", canoeing, ice cream trucks, David Lynch, the Brooklyn Bridge, seas of wheat, lemonade stands, the Ashcan School, the W.P.A., tire swings, the Fort Worth Doughboys, "Dragnet", backyard barbecues, San Francisco's North Beach, Disneyland, the state of Kansas, James Cagney, freedom of speech, barber shop poles, the state fair, Route 66, Mark Twain, jukeboxes, Aaron Copland, corny dogs, 7-Eleven, R. Crumb, the Sears & Roebuck Catalog, the Superbowl, five-and-dime stores, grain elevators, Edward Gorey, the Little Rascals, the Grand Canyon, *Whipped Cream & Other Delights*, apple pies cooling on the window sill, *Sunset Magazine*, RC Cola, the Modern Library, John Waters, Andy Warhol, "true crime" books, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, Dover Publications, Inc., Wall Drug, Mt. Rushmore, "The Price is Right," Crispin Glover, the Tosca Café, Central Park, New Orleans' French Quarter, Sousa marches, biscuits 'n' gravy, old barns, fireflies.

§ **February 14.** Lucie was ill all night. We assumed at first it was food poisoning, but by dawn it was apparent she was suffering the symptoms of appendicitis. We took a cab four blocks to St. Francis; by dinnertime she had had the faulty organ removed.

§ **February 17.** After spending the day visiting Lucie, I returned home to find the cats had knocked the pink chair over, shattering one of the shelves of the iron and glass bookcase behind it. A favorite decoration had fallen to the floor, which now bore teeth marks.

§ **February 18.** Spent the day visiting Lucie in hospital (I love to say *in hospital* in the British manner instead of *in the hospital*); she's mad because the night nurse was mean to her. At 4:30 I left to move the car;

our usual secret spot on Post was taken, so I had to park several blocks past Divisadero. By the time I finally returned to the hospital, Lucie had dressed and was ready to go(!); Dr. Chao had appeared and said she could go home.

§ **February 20.** At dusk, I accompanied Lucie around the block for some exercise. At the corner store, we stopped for a Chore Boy brand scrubbing pad. As Lucie was telling Ahmed about her appendectomy, a man with an voluminous knitted cap over his dreadlocks interrupted, “Yeah, it’s just like that story “The Lottery”...do you know that story, “The Lottery”? I read it in *school*...it’s about these people who won the *lottery* and then they were *stoned*!” Before we knew it, Lucie and I were surrounded by creeps and cranks all talking excitedly about the lottery and stoning people. After paying for the Chore Boy, Lucie and I hustled out the door, confused and a little scared.

§ **February 23.** On the bus this morning I asked Josh, who lives on the next block, if he has heard the “Midnight Whistler” in our neighborhood, and he said, “Yeah, that’s how the crack dealers communicate with each other. They have different whistles for different things; one to indicate a buyer, one to signal that the coast is clear, and so on.” I am sorry I asked!

§ **February 25.** I accompanied Lucie to the office of Dr. Chao, who removed Lucie’s bandage to reveal the neat four-inch Lanz incision he made two weeks ago. On the way home we stopped at the grocer’s, where we bumped into our neighbor Thom, who is in our old class at the Alliance Française. He invited us, in French, to see him perform with the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus the songs of Elton John; we told him we would think about it. Thom is sweet, but I think I would rather spend an afternoon flinging Elton John records into the bay than to listen to a gay chorus for one minute.

§ **February 26.** Lucie and I have decided that, as soon as we have paid off the credit card and my student loans, we’re leaving California for a simpler life somewhere else, perhaps a small college town. Lucie and I looked in our 1947 Rand McNally *Road and Reference Atlas* and, starting with Alabama on page one, considering the pros and cons of each state. Alabama, for example, ranks high in soybean production, while Connecticut boasts our country’s oldest newspaper. Colorado, on the other hand, has a

boring shape while Illinois is home to Illinois Nazis. While the jury is far from reaching a verdict, we'll be keeping our eye on the Midwestern states.

§ **March 3.** My boss says she has no problem whatsoever with my telecommuting from another state, that the company even encourages it. I'll lose a 5

§ **March 4.** When I went to the Danny's Professional Dry Cleaners to pick up my corduroy coat, the woman behind the counter handed it to me and said, "Four dollar." I paid and left, but moments later decided to see if they had gotten the mustard stain out, which they had not. What's more, the corduroy had a mangy look about it, as if they had tried to scrape the stain away with a screwdriver. I returned to the cleaners, and after shewing the woman the damage, was told "Sorry" and "I will talk to manager and call you." The damage is irreparable; it will be interesting to see how this is resolved.

§ **March 5.** Last night we were awakened by a appalling crash. I sat up in bed, turned on the light and fumbled for my eyeglasses, but the room seemed to be in order. After searching the apartment and even looking out the window, I found nothing, but just as I was ready to return to bed I saw what the fuss was about—one of the cats had knocked an ornate glass box, in which we keep the remote controls, off its shelf and onto the floor. A couple of hours later, Loulou slammed the door to the bathroom, sending a shock wave of adrenaline rushing through my body; I slept no more after that.

This morning at work I was charmed by two wild parrots in the tree outside my office window; I could not tell if they loved each other or if they were fighting. Each time I turned around to look, they flew away, only to return. I had errands to do at lunch and therefore found the need for a meal in the "fast" manner. I chose Wendy's Old-Fashioned Hamburgers, where a squatter near the entrance begged me for a ride to the BART station, some three blocks away. At the counter, I accidentally "Biggie-Sized" my meal after responding "yes" to a mumbled question. After eating until I no longer had the energy to chew, I left behind a mountain of fries and half a bucket of Pibb Xtra.

After work, Lucie and I went to the grocer's for lettuce and milk, where I saw the word "ovenable" on a frozen potato product.

§ **March 6.** The manager of Danny's never called, so I returned this afternoon. The woman behind the counter spoke little English, but I managed to glean from her phonetic outbursts that the manager had told her to say my coat was "old," the stains were "old," the damage was due to "moth holes" (pronounced *moff hoe*). Every time I tried to say something she would only repeat *moff hoe, moff hoe*; the smug look on her face seemed to suggest that the matter was resolved and that I should leave. I could see that there was nothing more to say to the professionals at Danny's Professional Dry Cleaners, so after work I went to Nordstrom; to my disbelief, they let me return the coat for a full refund.

§ **March 10.** We keep seeing the man in the little flowered mini-skirt. Lucie and I saw him last week, and I have seen him twice in as many days. The middle-aged man (who looks not unlike Charleston Heston in *Soylent Green*) has appalling style—a '49ers windbreaker worn over a bleach-blotched Izod, penny loafers split at the heel, and of course the tiny, pleated skirt, worn as short as possible without exposing the undergarments. He's not a proper transvestite; only the skirt is out of place. Despite the proliferation of oddballs in our neighborhood, he is by far the most conspicuous.

§ **March 11.** Today a ranting transvestite shouted at me, something incomprehensible about the difference between whites and blacks in bed, and something about how the chief of police sleeps with white (or black) girls. The man was tall and athletic, with a sort of purple costume a minor superhero might wear (*sans* identifying logo), a superhero who has not worked nor bathed, nor mended his costume in five years. He carried several garbage bags stuffed with what look like might be towels. Under his short purple cotton skirt were torn, black, crotchless tights (the holes extended to mid-thigh); his lumpy, makeshift bosom was bursting with rolled up socks; his long, skinny legs ended in a pair of large, pneumatic athletic shoes. I will call him Purple Man.

§ **March 13.** Up at 11:00, with a headache and feeling rather weak-kneed. It was a veritable hurricane outside; I had to shut the windows for fear the curtains would be pulled from their rods. The freezer had been left open all night; everything has melted, including a box of popsicles which have leaked their colours into the ice trays.

§ **March 16.** A very busy day at the library. Who I was certain was a vicious gang member—he wore his pants around his knees, an enormous '49ers parka (it's 65° today), several heavy golden necklaces, a golden tooth, and a bandana on his head—turned out to be an extremely polite young man. He was searching for a copy of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*; he later asked for Frank Herbert's *Dune*.

§ **March 17.** There is a terrific ant infestation in my office; I kept finding them on my hands. What attracted them I don't know, but the problem comes and goes; I believe the building is on the site of an ancient ant burial ground. The right headlight on the car is out again, so at lunch I went to Kragen for another bulb (plus a spare to keep in the trunk). The problem is vexing; I'm tired of buying replacements, but I hesitate to take the car to the dealer. I suppose I had better just do it.

§ **March 18.** A ganglion cyst, which I had surgically removed from my ankle when a teenager, has reappeared. I looked the malady up on the internet, where reputable sources suggested I might be able to get the lump aspirated. I will wait a week or two to see if it goes away before making a doctor's appointment. Why can't I suffer from something more romantic such as consumption? How does one go about contracting consumption?

§ **March 19.** To avoid the mob of ill-informed anarchists, vandals, and self-righteous lunatics (we are our own worst enemy!) gathered at Market and Powell ostensibly to protest the war, chant slogans, block traffic (and loot a few Foot Lockers in the bargain), I walked home on Post. At Stockton, a man waved a newsletter in my face, which I declined with a wave of my hand; as I continued on my way I heard him sneer, "You should go to *Iraq*." On an average walk from the bus station to home (or vice versa), I am approached by as many as a dozen people, begging for change, cursing or mumbling at me, waving a clipboard at me, waving their arms at me, or trying to sell me something. This bothersome phenomenon has become (or always was?) San Francisco's most distinctive feature, after the Golden Gate Bridge and cable cars. Today was no different; in front of my own building I had to squeeze by a man doing a drunken jig while smoking two cigarettes at once. Beans and rice for dinner while watching the war on MSNBC; to bed at 10:15.

§ **March 20.** Protesters have brought traffic in San Francisco to a standstill, lying in the streets, whining, chanting, cursing at police officers, shouting, waving, crying, sneering, throwing tantrums, clanking their chains, dragging their feet, and being complete nuisances. Anarchists, whom I once regarded as merely laughable, shewed us what they're made of by throwing rocks, spitting, brawling, and behaving like savages; they obviously care little about America, Iraq, or anybody else except themselves. I can hardly think for the noise of helicopters hovering overhead since 7:30 this morning; I closed the windows but now it's stuffy in here. Watched the war on the picture box all morning while drinking tea and working.

By evening, the mob's behaviour predictably worsened; they stomped on the roofs of cars, hurled newspaper machines into the streets; they have several attempts to storm the Bay Bridge, but the police have thus far held their ground. One group of protesters staged a "Vomit In" at the Federal Building to demonstrate how the war makes them ill, before trying to break into it. How pleased Saddam would be to hear it!

§ **March 26.** I found in our basement a mangy old taxidermist's pheasant, mounted on a wooden base. I sneaked it into our apartment while Lucie slept, placing it on top of one of the bookcases. When Lucie saw it, she uttered a cry of glee. I told her I was going to take it to work Monday and put it in Oliver's office, to complement the talking trout I hung on his wall last year. The cats didn't notice the bird right away, but after lifting each one up in the air, Monty began chattering wildly, while pacing back and forth before the bookcase; however, Loulou was completely uninterested. When I placed the bird on the table, both sniffed it thoroughly, but I had to put it back on top of the bookcase after Monty tried to bite its long, feathered tail.

§ **March 27.** Lucie's cold is much worse; I hope it isn't SARS. I worked all day without stopping, then took the bus home at 4:00. Later, I called Max's for dinner then went down there to pick it up. My timing would have been perfect; the place was empty except for the arrival just before me of a party of fifty high school girls who made it nearly impossible to even enter the building. On the way back home I saw Purple Man, blocking the sidewalk with his garbage bags, shouting his head off about AIDS, how good black girls are in bed, and the size of his genitalia. I nearly got hit by a speeding Hummer while crossing the street to avoid him. Moments later, a sort of "mountain man" appeared, moth-eaten and wild-eyed. He stopped



suddenly before me, licked his middle finger, bent over and stuck it in a crack in the sidewalk, retrieving a small, white flake of something. After smelling the flake, he then ate it. I wonder what it was?

Someone has painted the following sinister message on the sidewalk in front of our building:

JOHN DAVID HARRIS

YOUR # IS UP YOURS

MY HAND WILL DOWN YOU

BXXM!

Who is John David Harris? Does he live in our building? I suppose he had better watch his step!

§ **April 2.** Left the office at 3:30 to pick up Lucie in Palo Alto; we went to see *Madame Satan* (1930) and *Night World* (1932) at the Stanford Theater. Despite every contrivance imaginable, both were really not very good, but Lucie and I adored them all the same for the snappy dialogue, outlandish costumes, and glorious art deco atmosphere. *Madame Satan* was billed as a comedy, but its biggest laugh was, I think, unintentional; when the zeppelin lost control and crashed into the tower, there was a loud “pop” which was obviously the sound of champagne being uncorked. Dinner afterwards at the Peninsula Creamery; chicken salad for me, French dip for Lucie. The Creamery’s atmosphere has been faithfully preserved since the ’30s, my only complaint are the divided naugahyde booths, whereby one is obligated to share the same narrow bench seat with a stranger, separated by a wooden partition. The gentleman next to me kept wiggling and wouldn’t sit still. I longed to peer over the partition and demand that he settle down, but how I do loathe confrontations.

§ **April 4.** Up and at ’em at 11:30. Lucie and I watched movies all day; *Ivanhoe* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (both of which I enjoyed immensely despite the fact that the dialogue was Modern English and not subtitled Anglo-Saxon), *The Bad and the Beautiful*, and *From Here to Eternity*. We did do some menial chores; I Hoovered the carpets while Lucie washed the slipcovers of the divan and chair. I went to the corner store a record four times in one day; separate trips for cat litter, laundry detergent,

milk, and *eau minérale*. Each time, Charlie and I had the same conversation, *verbatim*:

“Hello, how are you, my friend!”

“Very good, thank you,” I reply. “How are you?”

“I am good because *you* are good, my friend.”

Since her appendectomy, Charlie always ask about Lucie; I think he is in love with her, especially after she shewed him her scar. Whenever he sees her, he calls her “Sweetie”.

§ **April 6.** Lucie has received a courriel from her old friend Harriet-Camille, which was a pleasant surprise. Harriet-Camille seems to be doing well; we “Ask Jeeves’d” her and found images of her latest work, which is quite different from what she was doing several years ago, more abstract and less psychological. It would be nice if Lucie and Harriet-Camille could be friends again.

After dinner we watched “A Haunting in Connecticut”, a creepy television program about a family who, after moving into a former funeral home, is tormented by a well-dressed but frightening demon (who I thought resembled hair product kingpin Paul Mitchell), whom they referred to as the “man in the suit.” To bed at 11:00.

§ **April 7.** I had nightmares about Paul Mitchell; he was dressed in the manner of the Brawny paper towel man. Lucie and I were living in a quaint little farmhouse; nearby was a copse in which from our porch we could see a figure in silhouette. I made *shoo* noises to frighten him away; instead, he approached as we fled indoors; he thrust his arms through a window with a crash. I waited upstairs, where lay pointing a rifle down the hall (the rifle had a little red flag on the end of the barrel for some reason), waiting for Paul Mitchell’s glowing red eyes to appear in the darkness. Lucie and I have lived in upstairs apartments for the last decade; the idea of living in a farmhouse now frightens me a little. We’ll definitely have to install an alarm system. That is, if we ever move to a farmhouse. Lucie and I are ambivalent about leaving the Barbary Coast. If we didn’t live in such a marginal (i.e. vibrant) neighborhood, I think we would be much happier, but property is so expensive here, ridiculously so, the natural result of unchecked greed and overspeculation.

Despite my anxiety dreams, I was in a jolly mood all day. My chicken salad sandwich was tasty, things have calmed down a bit at the office, and I received a rare book in the mail—the joys of the padded brown envelope! After work, I purchased a special rubber stamp kit which I can use to spell anything; it was made in Austria and therefore has all the accented characters, umlauts, cedilles, ligatures, &c. But what to stamp? A late dinner at the Pinecrest, a club sandwich for Lucie and a bowl of chili for me. The streets were swarming with people of a dubious nature—how I hate being out after dusk!

§ **April 8.** On the bus to-day Lucie and I saw an aged punk. He was in his mid-40's, covered in tattoos, sporting a mohawk hairdo, technologically advanced monster boots, leather jacket, earrings, safety pins everywhere, &c. A spike through his nose gave him a sort of a moronic, cross-eyed look. From his belt dangled a large ring of several dozen keys, the majority of them undoubtedly useless, unless he was the janitor of a large office building. He carried tucked under his arm the book *Darwin's Children* by Greg Bear. I felt humiliated for him.

Charles Douglass, inventor of the despised laugh track is dead [insert light chortling here]. Perhaps they'll play one during his eulogy [fade in uproarious laughter, then applause].

§ **April 10.** Lucie and I spent all morning at H&R Block; when we arrived the sour-pussed Oriental receptionist addressed Lucie as “Sir”—the same woman who called her Sir last year! While we waited, the girl sitting behind us, who was a “compulsive talker,” started talking about the war in Iraq to anyone unfortunate enough to make eye contact with her. An annoyed man finally responded, and a quarrel ensued. Embarrassingly ill-informed, the girl's arguments were all variants of the “war is bad” variety; she continually whined, “Why not Korea? We should send troops there because they *admitted* they have missiles.” Her opponent was patient with her, but his arguments went well over her head. A middle-aged Lesbian in a Bonnie Raitt t-shirt joined in the fray, interrupting the others with a jab of her finger with statements like, “This is all about *oil*” and voicing admiration for the human shields. During a brief lull in the discussion, the compulsive talker blurted, indignantly, “*And...they said SUV's are getting five miles per gallon now.*”

§ **April 11.** Spent the afternoon searching for a manual typewriter; I finally found a ravishing '30s-era Underwood. It weighs more than a Buick and is an absolute dream to type on. Alas, where will I put it?

After dinner we watched the silly but pleasant *And God Created Woman*, which for some reason I have never seen. Bardot is overrated as a sex symbol, although her sunbathing scene is notable.

§ **April 12.** A rare, rainy morning. Lucie and I awoke at 9:00 and spent the day at the library. We got little work done to-day, because Mexy told us about a website called <http://www.hotornot.com> [www.hotornot.com](http://www.hotornot.com) which we looked at for hours—*mon dieu*, these *people*! For laughs, I submitted my own photo, which so far has earned me the lamentable rating of 5.5 on a scale of ten. I am apparently lukewarm at best, outrated by snot-nosed hoodlums, mouthbreathing iron pumpers, and sunburned frat boys. Perhaps I should start wearing my pants around my ankles, buy some cheap jewelry, and adopt a permanent sneer? Later, Lucie submitted a photographic collage of herself, which has yet to be approved by the Hot or Not moderators. This site is fascinating for so many reasons; it's a remarkable cross-section of society, albeit a mostly younger, computer-literate (if not *actually* literate) cross-section. Who receives the highest ratings is testament to today's conception of beauty; I found all of these people to be quite hideous—the false tans, false breasts, false lips, pierced noses, trendy clothing...ack!

While taking the recycling down to the basement, I found an abandoned Indonesian urn, which I seized. I had planned on putting it in Oliver's office, but Lucie suggested we use it to hold umbrellas. Turkish food for dinner while watching *Alphaville* (Godard's most unintelligible film), followed by the dismal *Histoires extraordinaires*, a.k.a. *Tales of the Imagination*, based on the stories of Poe, who must flail wildly in his grave whenever the film is still shown.

§ **April 13.** To-day at the library a man returned the *Brideshead Revisited* DVD, explaining he had dropped it in the bay. What a tickle-brained pumpkin! I was able to clean the discs, which are scratched only a little by grains of sand, but the booklet and cardboard inserts are ruined. Later, a salty old sea captain stretched out in a chair and began snoring loudly. I woke him up and said "Snoring's against regulations, Sir." He was apologetic, but as soon as I walked away, he started snoring again. Hazel

and I both asked him several more times over the next hour to stop snoring; I finally had to ask him to leave. At 4:59, a woman checked out at least fifty children's books while another woman decided to fill out several hold requests; this, after I had loudly made all the closing announcements at thirty, ten, and five 'til and turned off all the lights. After evicting the captain from the lobby, we finally left the building at 5:14.

§ **April 14.** I am ashamed to admit that I looked at Hot or Not again. Lucie's rating is a 9.1; dozens of creepy men have requested to meet her, despite it being clearly stated in her profile that she is happily married and not looking for a date. Some of the bizarre keywords these men use to describe themselves include—*sex*, *sexy*, *anime* (a West Indian resin?), *jessus* [sic], *casino*, *chillin*, *crotchrockets* (some of these aren't in my OED), *drugs*, *white*, *piercing*, *video games*, *party*, *horny*, *beer*, *drinking*, *clubbing*, &c., others are too disgusting to repeat here. Every other man lists *sushi* as a keyword, while nearly as many list both *volkswagen* for some reason; I had no idea sushi and Volkswagens were so popular.

§ **April 15.** I dream about losing my teeth. In these dreams, the teeth are deformed, putrifying, or bovine. It starts with a wiggle, I run my tongue over it and get that sinking feeling the tooth can't be saved. Sometimes I try to put it back in the hole, but it won't stay. When I was a child, each time I lost a bicuspid it was a traumatic experience for me. I dread the day the dentist says, "We'll have to pull all those" and hands me a denture brochure. My chompers in a glass of water. My empty, shriveled mouth, agape.

§ **April 16.** Someone threw a rock through our office window, which landed in my cubicle. No one knew what had caused the broken window until I found the rock behind my wastebasket; it looked rather like a moon rock. If it wasn't hurled by a disgruntled owner of our faulty software, it must have been one of the numerous neighborhood hobos, who always seem to be angry. Some sort of "server" was down to-day (if only we were served in our cubicles!), so I wrote and listened to Monteverdi while my colleagues stood around talking about cartoons.

§ **April 18.** On the way home I stopped by Borders to see if they had any books on Odilon Redon (they did not, nor did the helpless customer

service representative know who he was). Just as I was entering, G. E. Smith of “Saturday Night Live” fame was leaving after having just performed; it would be the second time I’ve seen him in this neighborhood. Spent a scant half-hour working on a dismal short story, which I already hate. Spaghetti for dinner while watching a couple of flawed but brilliant Guy Maddin films, *Careful* and *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*. Now I want to see them all! I remember Le Video had a whole section devoted to him.

I finally caught Dinah red-pawed after she had opened the closet and pulled down one of Lucie’s feathery negligées. I didn’t want to discipline her because she is too easily frightened, but I did seal the door tightly with a rubber doorstop. Let’s see her open it now!

§ **April 19.** Dinah is obsessed with entering the closet, she stands on her hind legs and pushes the mirrored door with all her might, staring herself in the face and meowing. Mr. Darcy, I fear, has an eye infection, the poor blighter. Lucie says he feels feverish but I don’t know what a cat’s temperature is supposed to be. I could never have real children; I would worry about them incessantly, especially when we are separated.

§ **April 21.** Read interviews with and articles about Guy Maddin all day at work, while listening to Ockeghem. For lunch, I went to the new Bay Street mall in Emeryville, which is vast, barren and confusing; I actually saw a tumbleweed. I would have felt too conspicuous eating in a deserted Rubio’s Baja Grill or the ill-named Fuddrucker’s, so I left without eating.

Shrimp salad for dinner while watching *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* with the commentary track on; afterwards, I started it again with the original soundtrack so I could transfer it to a recordable compact disc. Technology bores me stiff, but sometimes I am grateful for it. Since I can’t conveniently listen to LPs at work, there are fortunately CDs and headphones.

§ **April 23.** Could it be we’re on the verge of having a social life? Several friends and acquaintances are suggesting we get together for dinner at various times and places, but since Lucie and I are wage slaves seven days a week (I have three jobs while Lucie has two), we never have the energy. We’re always relieved when plans fall through, content to stay at home together, alone, where we’re happiest. Spent the evening watching *Time Regained* for the second time; did people really eat strawberries with aether? I should like

to try that sometime, I think. Perhaps when I get around to finally reading Proust, as it seems I am the only person I know who isn't intimately familiar with his works.

§ **April 24.** Watched Feuillade's *Les Vampires* all day—seven hours' worth! Musidora in a black body stocking! I lapped it up, but I have a few minor complaints about what was otherwise an outstanding job at the restoration of the series. The original titles were discarded in favour of new English ones which seemed quite out of place; why couldn't have they have simply subtitled the originals? Also, the new recording of the original score was marred by digital stereo sound; I would have preferred glorious mono with added scratches for an authentic touch; instead, I turned the soundtrack down and played my own 78s, which were so much more appropriate, I thought.

Lucie and I discussed the logistics of traveling to *fin-de-siècle* Paris in a time machine. Such a machine would likely transport us through time and not space; upon our arrival in the year 1905 (let's make it before the earthquake), we would somehow have to make our way to Paris from San Francisco. With what money?—Our credit cards would be worthless, and nobody would recognize the new twenty-dollar bills. We would beforehand have to purchase old money from a collector. Then there is the matter of identification; and how would we obtain passports? "Excuse me, Sir, where may one obtain false identification?" In addition, *prior* to our departure, we would have to dress ourselves in the appropriate style. I wouldn't want to embarrass myself like Michael J. Fox did when he wore that sleeveless sleeping bag vest into that diner in *Back to the Future*.

§ **April 25.** The alternator went out on the "social liability" today; I tried to make it back to the office but the engine began sputtering and finally died. I walked the remaining distance in the rain, called a tow truck, then returned to the car to wait. However, I was able to start the car again, so I raced towards the garage only to break down again diagonally across the intersection from my destination. Fortunately, I saw a tow truck parked in front of a donut shop across the street; I approached the driver, who agreed to tow the car the remaining fifty feet for twenty dollars.

While the car was being repaired, I walked down the street to a McDonald's "fast food" restaurant, which was full of gangster rappers, ill-behaved children, and lonely old people. I ate as quickly as I could then fled. McDon-

ald's is one of those unhappy places where one eats only when one has no other choice (there was a Church's Fried Chicken across the street but I will eat there under no circumstances, I would rather pick berries from strange bushes). I suppose I could have chosen not to eat at all, but a man must eat!

§ **April 26.** Up at 7:30 to get to the Friends of the Library book sale early. On the way to get the car, I stopped for cash at one of those overly friendly Citibank ATM's—this one said to me, “Please dip in your card and then take it back out.” After I “dipped in” my card, it said, “I am working on it.” Who wrote that tripe?

§ **April 27.** To-day is Lucie's birthday! She accompanied me to the library, turning heads everywhere we went with her eclectic flapper-era inspired attire. If she turns heads here on the Barbary Coast, what might they think of her in Kansas? After work, we went to La Parisienne, where Lucie chose a pair of jet and turquoise ear rings and a Czechoslovakian glass choker for herself. For my mother's birthday next week, I selected an art nouveau gold pin in the shape of African violets. Afterwards, we had a hearty dinner at the Baker Street Bistro; they were out of rabbit again, so I devoured a steak, while Lucie had *blanquette de veau*. Harold Lloyd films on TCM; to bed at midnight.

§ **April 28.** Slept until eleven o'clock. Lucie and I called in sick and spent the entire day listening to LPs, reading, fanning ourselves, and lying around. After dinner we watched a mini-series on PBS called “Manor House”, an historical “reality” show set in Edwardian Britain, reminiscent of “Upstairs, Downstairs”. The cast, a family of five (the Olliff-Coopers—what a smart name!) with a staff of fourteen volunteers, must live at Manderston, a grand country house, and play their rôles as if they were living in the year 1905. *Mon dieu*, how I would love to participate in such a project, even if I had to play the scullery maid, however, I think I could have been a splendid butler. As I write this I am reminded of Patrick Dennis, who abandoned his brilliant career as a writer to become Ray Kroc's (of Big Mac infamy) butler, but I digress.

I often wonder, if I could have chosen the era in which I lived, which era that would be. Instead of being born in 1968, I might like to have died of old age in that year. During my *fin-de-siècle* childhood, I would have witnessed



the birth of cinema, and the avant-garde, not to mention radio and later, the picture box. I would have lived through the Jazz Age and experienced first-hand my favourite era of popular music, fashion, and style. Of course, there was the Great Depression and two world wars, but that's not enough to change my mind. I could have spent my old age in the oblivious 'Fifties and lived long enough to know the films of the French New Wave. I admit I am too afraid to have lived during the Renaissance; I would doubtless have been beheaded for something I said or wrote.

§ **May 1.** Upon our arrival to the library this afternoon, it seemed as all hell had broken loose. Fire trucks, police cars, and emergency vehicles of every caliber were strewn about, alarms were going off in the building, and police were struggling in the street with a naked, ranting man. Lucie and I walked a wide arc around the appalling scene, by now quite used to life in a defeated city.

On the way home we stopped by Johny's (their spelling, not mine) for cheese steak sandwiches, which were delicious but revolting. Lucie and I must return to our regular eating habits, of late disrupted by our constant work schedule.

§ **May 2.** This morning I rescued a snail who was quite doomed where I found him, halfway up a metal door, almost at the brink of death. As I pulled him from the door, slight moisture suggested he might still be alive; I set him down on the driveway, now wet from a recent cloudburst, and watched his slow recovery. Within minutes, he had emerged from his shell, wiggling his antennae happily and inching off into the bushes...

§ **May 3.** Mr. Darcy's eye infection is suddenly worse after we believed it had gone away, so I took him to the Nob Hill Cat Clinic. On the way there and back, we chased a few pigeons and stopped to smell several bushes; a young couple eating at the Moulin Rouge waved and blew kisses at Mr. Darcy. The doctor prescribed eye drops for the malady; when Lucie and I tried to administer the medicine Mr. Darcy just about had a fit, I have never seen him so upset. In the end we had to roll him up in a blanket like a Ho-Ho; of course, as soon as it was all over he acted like nothing had happened, although Dinah kept a wary eye on us for a little while.

§ **May 4.** I was awakened at 4:30 this morning by the same crowd of youngsters who disturbed our slumber on the first of February. In a gesture of appalling contempt for propriety the girl was screaming hysterically at what must have been the world's most hilarious joke. Her mirth quickly turned to dismay as a volley of eggs rained down upon her head. Without a word, the crowd retreated into the building and shut the door. However, after the excitement was over, I was never really able to fall back asleep.

Lucie accompanied me to the library; on the way, we stopped by La Parisienne for a vase Lucie had seen last week but it was sold. There was some sort of street fair to-day, so it wasn't very busy at the library. An elderly gentleman asked me if I spoke French; I replied, *un peu*. He wanted me to translate a French cartoon in to-day's newspaper; another elderly gentleman lamented the disappearance of our card catalog; a third old man wanted a poem about dogs. Lucie and I spent most of the afternoon flipping through *Town & Country* magazines and making fun of the advertisements and articles; we laughed so hard a library patron had to *shush* us—imagine, someone shushing a librarian!

§ **May 5.** On the side of the historic Hobart Building, there used to be an innocuous but not unattractive painted design of an old-fashioned carriage, below which were the words, "Since 1852." The building's owners have painted over the design, which is now a 20'-tall gray hexagon and smaller gray rectangle which are quite an eyesore. The 1914 high-rise, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, is marred by the thoughtless alteration. If they had wanted to remove the design (but why?), they should have done the job properly. Now it would take double the effort to restore the wall to its original condition. As I walked by the building to-day, the music of an insane woman banging random keys on an amplified Casio keyboard seemed to underscore my distress over this petty-minded deed. Mediocrity strikes again!

§ **May 6.** Slept late; luncheon at the Grand Café with Carmella, which was fun. Carmella looks wonderful, and seems happier than the last time we saw her—five *years* ago! She and Lucie had much catching up to do. I felt a little bit like a third wheel; everything that came out of my mouth seemed prosy and long-winded. I dominated our last minutes together with a rambling thesis on doing one's laundry.

After work Lucie and I returned home and shared a pizza pie while watching *Design for Living* (1933)—I laughed so hard I almost spit out my pizza (I wanted to write “false teeth”, but I don’t have false teeth). I forget how funny Noël Coward is! The costumes and interiors were to *die* for, too. In one scene, I caught a glimpse of a bed which I simply must have, in the style of Greek Revival, filtered through an Art Déco sensibility. No such bed exists in stores; what would it take to design and build my own? If I were only handy with tools!

§ **May 7.** Luncheon at the Albany Bowl, which is patronized almost exclusively by elderly Asians. The service is perfunctory and the food even more so—why do I eat there? Because the place is a product of a bygone era; the other diners are well-behaved and I can say Sir and Ma’am without feeling out of place; the lighting is natural, there is no objectionable music, and the atmosphere is peaceful. While eating my chili dog with cheese and onions I continued to read *Lost Illusions*, which I began in January and still have not finished—at this rate I shall have read two books this year. On the way back to work I stopped by Barnes & Noble to preview albums. They have these laser scanner things now, you put on the headphones then wave the item under the red beam of light. While browsing, I spotted a plastic divider which said “DOWLAND–Sorcer’s [sic] Apprentice”; I took it up to the counter and said to the woman behind it, “There are two mistakes here, do you know what they are?” She spotted the misspelling of “sorcerer” but I had to tell her the work was not by Dowland but Dukas (which I had to spell for her). Afterwards, I felt like such a fussy smart-ass.

§ **May 8.** A fine, cold, crystal clear morning. While walking down O’Farrell this morning I witnessed two dames fighting; one clubbed the other with a cardboard box which was followed by hair-pulling and shrieking. I walked in the street to avoid the brouhaha. Mr. Jenkins paid us a visit today; when he stopped by my office we had little to say to one another, it was an awkward moment. I proceeded to put my foot in my mouth by pooh-poohing one of his pet products; I then had the impudence to complain about my working conditions. As I continued my rambling soliloquy he inched out of the room, stroking his chin and mumbling, “We’ll see what we can do...”

A note from Biber to say the postcard I had sent him from Paris has just arrived. Where has it been all this time?

§ **May 9.** An unpleasant bus ride for Lucie and I this evening. First, I nearly killed myself on an Egg McMuffin someone had thrown on the floor. Moments later, the driver stopped the bus mid-block to confront a fare dodger, a wild-eyed derelict who refused to disembark. The driver called the police, then apologized over the loudspeaker for the delay. For several minutes while the pony-tailed pariah shouted insults from the rear of the double-length bus the driver repeated “Thank you” while whistling a tune, but before the police could arrive the scofflaw fled, waving his middle finger behind him. Later, as we disembarked, we noticed a Bell Canada truck parked next to an open manhole surrounded by orange cones. What are *they* doing here?

Chimes was our guest for dinner. Lucie prepared a meal of curried chicken over rice with raita while Chimes supplied the naan; for dessert—Turkish delight. We stayed up until midnight watching *The Matrix*, which Lucie and I had felt obligated to see because Harriet-Camille wants us to see the *The Matrix Reloaded* with her on her birthday.

§ **May 10.** Lucie and I were awakened at nine o’clock by the window washers. Loulou hid under the desk and growled, which I had never heard her do, quite unaccustomed to seeing men outside our eighth-floor window. Monty wasn’t scared, but was nevertheless interested. After luncheon at a new Thai place up the street called Before and After (what does it mean?), we went to see *The Man Without a Past* at the Opera Plaza. Kaurismäki’s films are so melancholy yet somehow optimistic (there’s always a hopeful, if not happy, ending); in this one there was a scene in which we recognized a portrait of the late Matti Mellonpää hung above a table, a loving homage to Finland’s greatest actor and most beloved bohemian.

§ **May 11.** Today’s reference questions:

1. What is Prilosec for?
2. I’m looking for an article about Rorschach tests I saw in the *New York Times Magazine* recently.
3. I’m writing a paper on T. S. Eliot.
4. What is “rubato”?
5. My son wants a book about fire trucks.

6. Do you have any of these? [hands me a bibliography of highly technical books on engineering, none of which we have]

7. I'm writing a paper on slavery.

8. I need an antique-looking map of Santa Barbara. It's for our wedding invitations—we're getting married there.

9. What's it called when you paint with wax, and do you have any books on it?

I for some reason (how did they get my name?) have been invited to join the Naughty Librarian, a Yahoo! group for people who fetishize libraries and librarians. There was only one message posted, which encouraged members to share their stories of sexual encounters in libraries (alas, I have none). What is it about libraries that attracts these kinds of people? Are there similar groups representing other professions, say, for people who fantasize about accountants, grocery store clerks, and garbage men? Perhaps the appeal is due to the institutional aspect of libraries, akin to that of the post office, police department, and hospital (I myself have a weakness for *fin-de-siècle* nurses' uniforms, such as those in Guy Maddin's *Tales from Gimli Hospital*). Lucie says, and I think she is right, that it has more to do with "power" issues—the librarian as dominatrix.

*ibj May 13.j/bj* After work, Lucie and I waited thirty minutes in howling, freezing fog for the cursed 43, then another half-hour for the 38, which was crowded with every type of criminal, madman, and fool. We could take the N, but that means walking home five blocks down O'Farrell after dark—no thanks!

Lucie and I stayed up late watching a couple of Maysles films, *Salesman* and *Grey Gardens*. I liked *Grey Gardens* very much, a documentary on the lives of Mrs. Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter Edie, the aunt and first cousin of Jackie O., who lived in a squalid Long Island mansion with a host of cats, rats, and raccoons. Despite their bizarre eating habits (ice cream on crackers), odd attire, rambling conversations, and constant singing, I found these ladies not only endearing but downright irresistible (much more so than their celebrated Jackie), but inspirational, even, for their perpetual candor and for being unashamedly themselves. I could see myself ending up like them in my old age. I'm "myself" at home, but I am divers versions of myself, a social chameleon, in the company of others, which has always troubled me (for example, I use different styles of speech in different contexts—linguists call these "registers" but what is the sociological equivalent?); but as I get older

my personality seems to become more homogenized—is this a good thing? I have always regarded my neuroses and psychological idiosyncrasies as traits to be desired (disturbed people are so much more interesting to me than well-adjusted ones) and have nursed them accordingly; so far I have been able to suppress them when I need to. But to “let myself go” the way the Beales have without doubt poses a grave social disadvantage (by “social” I mean one’s fundamental ability to function in society).

§ **May 14.** This morning Lucie and I bumped into Dick Winchell—as soon as he saw us he cried, “Omigod, I’m calling Nico *right now*,” whipping out his cell phone. Every time we see him, he says we should get together and that he’ll call us, but never does. Dick looks much like Nicolas Cage now—Nicolas Cage sunglasses, forearms, hairline, tan, &c. Dick had to hurry to the gym, but promised we’d meet for drinks at the Grand Café Monday evening, whether Nico can make it or not.

The rat’s maze which is the streets of Berkeley have put me in a foul mood. While running various errands on my lunch break, I encountered every variety of traffic jam, construction, road hazard, and inopportune one-way street, not to mention the blocked intersections Berkeley is infamous for, whereby barriers have been set up, forcing one to turn when one should be going straight. My nerves, however, were later soothed by Lucie’s charm, a home-cooked meal, and *Sinner’s Holiday* (1931) in which Cagney and Blondell make their silver screen début, stealing the show from the leading couple, whose names I have already forgotten.

§ **May 17.** I have received in the mail from Biber two recordings—some beautifully played and recorded Haydn quartets, and Uri Caine’s quirky rendition of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* which I quite liked but for the jazzy vocals. I had to explain to Lucie that in record stores there is a whole section devoted to Bach oddities, under which are filed recordings of his music performed on kazoos, sitars, computers, banjos, and so on—this phenomenon seems to be limited to Bach for some reason.

While watching the film *Ridicule*, a scented candle we were burning on top of the picture box set suddenly flung itself onto the floor with a loud *pop*, getting wax all over the rug. It definitely wasn’t an earthquake—do we have a ghost? A poltergeist infestation? Should we telephone a priest?

§ **May 19.** Lucie and I have given up listening to the morning news; little of it is *real* news, most of it being lame newsroom banter, human (or animal) interest stories (a parachute wedding; a kitten in a well), pointless factoids, and pure sensationalism. Anything we need to know (such as the beginning of World War III) we'll hear about from a co-worker or by osmosis. But the news itself isn't the worst part, it's the bombastic automobile commercials which are broadcast at twice the volume of whatever preceded it, as if blasted from a cannon. Here's the latest formula: a generically attractive driver speeds over wet pavement, often skidding out of control, violating every traffic law and defying all common sense, sometimes doing the impossible such as racing over the surface of a lake or taking off like a rocket. The background (or more properly, *foreground*) music is a deafening rock 'n' roll tune, chosen for maximum appeal within the targeted age and economic group—Bob Seger for Chevy; Led Zeppelin(!) for Cadillac. Superficial features are touted, such as twin cup holders or a television screen in the backseat; safety features such as anti-lock brakes are mentioned but are rarely used in the dangerous situations depicted. The advertisement concludes with a gratuitous slow-motion shot of a test car crashing, then a close-up of the crash dummy being jerked around in his seat. This is followed by a lot of fast talk and repeated “zeros” (“*Zero* down at *zero* percent for *zero* months...” ) while a tiny, unreadable disclaimer whizzes across the bottom of the screen. When it's all over, the brief moment of silence which follows acts as a sort of sonic vacuum before one's ear drums are pummeled by the next in-your-face car commercial.

§ **May 20.** On the N this evening, Lucie and I were cornered by a hobo, who bragged to us of his rock 'n' roll days while playing air guitar and doing drunken jigs. After I said to him, “For God's sake, man, sit down before you hurt yourself,” he got mad and tried to jab me in the chest with his finger. Fortunately, another hobo boarded at the other end of the streetcar; soon, the two were singing and laughing, disembarking at Van Ness with their arms around each other.

Some damned fool has painted “Tranny Picnic May 18” on the sidewalk of every corner in our neighborhood.

§ **May 23.** I brought the phonograph to The Sound Well today, but they wanted sixty dollars just to look at it. For not much more, I bought another one, a late '70s Pioneer model without a lid (we don't need one).

Ah, to once again listen to vinyl! So much great music has not found its way to compact disc, or it has, and has already gone out of print so now the CD is more rare, even, than the LP. On the way home from work, I stopped by Amoeba to spend a credit slip, emerging with a stack of excellent old recordings, albums by Charles Aznavour, Yves Montand, and Ukulele Ike, the lesser-known piano concertos of Prokofiev, Roussel's *Le festin de l'araignée*, a Jolivet concerto for *ondes martenot* which looked interesting, an album of French musette accordion tunes, &c.

§ **May 24.** Lucie and I spent a cold, foggy day in the backseat of Guillaume's new Subaru, wandering along the back roads of Marin. Along the way we visited an enchanting Italian-style garden (associated with the Garden Valley Nursery near Petaluma), a bakery in Tomales for treats, and the beach at Bodega Bay. After lunch at The Tides restaurant, at the location (but not the actual building, which burned down) where Hitchcock's *The Birds* was filmed), we returned home, exhausted. We spent the rest of the evening watching the supplemental "Les salades de l'amour" disc of Criterion's new *The Adventures of Antoine Doinel* boxed set, which arrived in the mail today from Amazon.

§ **May 25.** Lucie and I slept late, then lounged around most of the day, listening to the phonograph, reading, and fussing around with the personal computer. Late in the afternoon we walked down to the Ferry Building, along the way window shopping, people watching, and wandering around in a couple of hotels. Except for the usual hordes of panhandlers, downtown seemed deserted, but we later found out there was some sort of huge festival in the Mission. After dinner, we watched Guy Maddin's *Archangel*, then read for the rest of the evening.

§ **May 26.** After listening to my new records all day (Jolivet's theremin sounds like a slide whistle), Lucie and I went to see the preposterous *The Matrix Reloaded* with Harriet-Camille and her artist friends. The movie was completely unbelievable, breaking its own vague rules as it sped along, however, as with all popular culture, I did find plenty to laugh at. While I was *just* able to grasp what the hell was going on in *The Matrix* (a co-worker explained it to me), the sequel left me dazed (from its near constant fighting, explosions, and chase scenes) and confused (by its pseudo-mystical pastiche of



technological mumbo-jumbo). Here is the plot as I understand it. The underground ghetto of Zion is threatened by earth-eating probes which will arrive in 72 hours. Morpheus tells the people of Zion the bad news and urges them to start stomping and beating on things, to let the probes know they aren't afraid. A full-blown rave ensues in the manner of an extended Kahlúa commercial, while Keanu and his girlfriend take the opportunity to sneak away and have excruciating sex in a pizza oven. Once inside the Matrix, the team is thwarted by an army of Agent Smiths (who, despite their vast numbers, are apparently harmless), a host of other unidentified agents driving tractor trailers, and tacky Miami Beach drug dealers with French accents (achieved instantaneously by inserting a computer chip into their necks). All are armed to the teeth but can't seem to hurt each other because they all know how to exploit the Matrix's weaknesses, for example, a car is riddled with bullets (when a thing is riddled with something it's always bullets, isn't it?) but its driver is unharmed; however, one bullet does manage to kill Keanu's girlfriend, who is promptly resurrected by the Superman-Christ figure Keanu. After easily shooting their way into an important-looking building, a diminutive Chinaman known as The Keymaster helps the team open the a few doors before he is done in by one of the Agent Smiths; Keanu thus gains access to a room filled with computer monitors and a man dressed in white, who tells Keanu this is the sixth time he has tried to save Zion. Keanu is confused by the man's psycho-babble, and decides to return to his spaceship. However, the spaceship is destroyed and Keanu is rendered comatose by robots; he ends up on a gurney next to a man who tried to stab him early in the story. Finally, it says, "To be continued." To be fair, the ideas behind *The Matrix* are interesting; it's just that action films aren't my cup of tea.

All of us reconvened at the Grand Café for Harriet-Camille's birthday dinner, where a good time was had by all until midnight. Harriet-Camille was funny and was the life of the party; meanwhile, Lucie and I spent time talking to each of her friends, who were all very nice and interesting. It was so odd to socialize; I somehow managed to make it through dinner without, I hope, saying anything too ridiculous. Oh, just when I thought we were cured of them, there was an earthquake today which I missed, but Lucie felt it.

§ **May 28.** It was a long, hot, noisy night, filled with the sounds of rap music, car alarms, revving motorcycles, sirens, klaxons, bells, whistles, and distant hammering—it's so stupid here! I tossed and turned under a wet towel until 5:25, when I was awakened by a man hosing down the playground

with a high-powered nozzle. On our way out the building this morning, Lucie and I saw the security guard (the one who had been in prison) eating Ruffles and dip for breakfast, which does much to explain why she looks the way she does. It was a whirlwind day at the office, one of those days during which one works non-stop, then almost misses the bus. Once home, I went to the deck on the 16th floor to cool off—it's always cool (usually freezing, actually) and windy up there—but our apartment is a furnace for some reason. By some quirk of architecture, it retains heat extremely well, something to be desired in, say, Winnipeg, but is a liability in San Francisco. It's in the 50s at night and I have to sleep under a wet towel? After dinner Lucie and I watched the preview to the new season of "The Real World" which was filmed in Paris. These insufferable brats are among the worst America has to offer; I winced as in one scene a cast member is shown berating a baffled Frenchman in English for almost running them down in a crosswalk. In another scene, several cast members are wandering around De Gaulle asking people, in English (but with open phrasebook in hand), "Where are the trains to Paris?" as people just shrug at them. Boy, am I going to *love* this!

§ **May 29.** I consider myself a true atheist, that is, I do not believe there is a God, who was invented by man to explain his existence; I can't explain how we got here any better than a religious person can. However, I do consider myself a "good" person, on par with your average Christian, I suppose. I can be conscientious, charitable, chivalrous, and all that rot, while at the same time, I can be quite misanthropic, lawless, and lacking in compassion, in thought if not in deed. My morals come from a combination of those of my parents and from reason. The trouble is, I am incapable of seeing any issue in black and white, it's always myriad shades of gray. I make choices but always worry about having made the wrong ones, or whether another choice might have been better. Part of me says, "Do the right thing," while another part says, "Who's to say what's right, and who cares anyway?" For some, the Bible tells them what to do, or their shrink, or their horoscope, but for me, I make it up as I go along, and that's quite a task sometimes—For, by living my life the way I think life should be lived, isn't it like saying how everyone else should live?

§ **May 30.** I have begun *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900*, by A. E. Carter. Although I so far understand what the author is trying to say, the extensive quotes are in French, which tends to slow me

down. I adore Decadent literature and feel that I have much in common with its authors, but I have never been interested in alcohol, hashish, or opium. I suppose had I lived during the period in question I would probably have indulged in every vice and perverted excess, but in this life I'm content to read about it and dream.

While walking down Sixth Street in Berkeley this morning, I happened across an odd pile of junk under a sign which read, "Free Stuff"—a pile of wicker baskets, a rusty metal trunk, six styrofoam heads painted different colours, crutches, a Chinese bamboo hat, a non-descript rug, and some stereo equipment covered in dew. It was so artfully arranged I thought at first I had stumbled across a bonanza, but alas, it was all trash, really.

Took the car home early to find Lucie writing; she had been at the computer all day and was gripping the mouse tightly, eyes glazed over. After dinner, we did laundry while watching a grainy documentary on architectural gargoyles.

§ **June 1.** Luncheon with Carmella at Café Fanny (one of Alice Waters' enterprises) in Berkeley. The *food* is naturally top-drawer, but everything else is surprisingly *wrong*. Service is unhurried, and the only place to sit is in full sunlight next to a parking lot, which has all the atmosphere of, well, a parking lot. Forlorn, hungry crowds linger nearby, plates balanced in their hands, waiting to descend on a table as soon as one is vacated. We waited ten minutes for a seat next to a plastic tub of dirty dishes, but later moved to another table in the shade of a Mercedes SUV. Seating is rather cramped, when we left I had to crawl over a bench and almost fell because I was ignorant of the precipice just beyond it. In addition, it can be expensive—a small bottle of San Pellegrino is, amazingly, \$3.25. I eat there sometimes for lunch, the trick is to arrive when they open at 11:00, grab a seat in the shade, and smuggle one's own beverage.

After lunch the three of us went to Prize (such a *darling* little shop) and the vintage clothing store across the street, then to Animal Farm where Carmella bought cat food and we bought a fake mouse for Loulou. Every time I shop there I can never find my Animal Farm frequent shopper cards which, if they're punched enough times, one may exchange for free merchandise. Somewhere at home I've a pile of them. We spent the rest of the afternoon at Carmella's; although she lives in a uncertain neighborhood, her eclectic Victorian flat is not without charm—one might use the phrase "decayed elegance" to describe its jumble of books (with titles like *Bisexuality*,

*Jack the Modernist*, and *A Year with Swollen Appendices*), cracked walls, objets d'art, and conversation pieces (gallon-sized milk jugs filled with coloured liquid. "What's in those?" I asked H.-C. "Urine," she responded in all seriousness). We chatted, cuddled with her cats, and looked at her latest work, which seems much more conceptual than what she was doing in the '90s—notebooks filled with flower doodles, giant canvases filled with *u*'s and *i*'s, and a tapestry of credit card receipts.

§ **June 2.** There is a new steel and glass monstrosity at 560 Mission next to which is a not unpleasant garden of sorts; next to a 'water feature' there is a path of crushed gravel exactly like the kind found in Parisian parks which cuts through a bamboo forest. When no one is there to ruin it for me, I take this peaceful shortcut as often as I can, as the gravel path is such a potent, yet subtle, reminder of Paris to me I simply must take advantage of it. For just a brief moment, the din of the city is replaced by the wind in the bamboo and the crunch of my feet upon the gravel, and I pretend (I know it's *quite* a stretch of the imagination) I'm walking through some humble corner of the Jardin des Plantes. Moments later, it's all over, and I'm shoving my way through the unwashed of Market Street.

§ **June 11.** This morning while walking with Lucie down our street, stepping over addicts in doorways and dodging beggars, we suddenly became aware of someone on our heels, an odious black man in a hooded parka. Fearing a purse snatching or worse, Lucie whispered, "This way," abruptly turning down Powell which we had just passed, but our foe was not so easily shaken.

"So you go'n do what 'cho wife tell ya?" he croaked into my left ear.

Stifling the urge to shout, "This is an outrage!" it was not me who spoke but Lucie, who responded with, "We're lost."

"You ain't *lost*," he chided, his toes touching mine. His breath stank of the gutter.

I took Lucie's hand and led her across the street; fortunately we were not followed. I felt less of a man now for not having slapped the swine's cheek.

§ **June 13.** I don't care for my bus driver in the mornings, who speeds, tailgates, weaves through traffic, pulls in front of oncoming cars, flirts disgustingly with every female within earshot (often turning around in his seat to do so), and closes the door and speeds away before one is finished stepping onto the curb (someday he'll end up dragging someone down the street). Somehow, I agreed to help him locate a hand-held counter (he calls it a "clicker"), which he says he needs to help him count the number of balls his son hits at the batting cage, and now he won't shut up about it. I told him to try the stationer's, which he won't do; he's computer illiterate, or he could simply find one on the World Wide Web by means of a popular search engine, such as Google (if I didn't have such a horror of computers I would locate the confounded gadget for him). By the time I disembark in West Berkeley, I am exhausted by his invariable chattering about baseball trivia, baseball cards, and how clever his son is at memorizing useless facts and figures. It's enough to drive one mad.

After work, Chimes and I picked up Lucie from the train station, then spent an evening together eating Indian food while watching the pleasurable (despite Elle Macpherson's atrocious acting) *Sirens* (1994). What I wouldn't give for Norman Lindsay's near-idyllic life (but substitute Bretagne for New South Wales, *s'il vous plaît*), but alas, I can't paint worth a damn (although I have made attempts to paint and draw Lucie, the most charming, ravishing and exquisite model since Kiki, the Queen of Montparnasse).

§ **June 15.** Like Huysmans' Jacques Marles, I feel like I have dabbled in everything but have mastered nothing. I do, however, deem myself well-versed in several subjects in which I am particularly interested and on which I could easily masquerade as an authority before the general public. Only recently, an colleague and I were discussing Mahler on the bus, and a fellow nearby excused himself to say he was "very impressed" by our knowledge—and I know very little of Mahler!

I have always wanted to be an expert on something, but consider myself at present merely moderately acquainted with a few subjects,

including 19th-century French literature, especially the life and work of J.-K. Huysmans, the Naturalists (Zola, *et al.*) and Decadents, popular music of the '20s and '30s, French and independent cinema, the history of the English language and linguistics in general, Surrealism and Dada, classical music, 19th-century Gothic literature, early 20th-century horror fiction,

bookselling and the library sciences, some astronomy, geography, orthography, and art history. But there are huge gaps, to be sure, and in the company of a true expert I would probably be deemed a dilettante in the any of the above topics. I am poorly educated in the realm of the sciences (I once scored a zero on a college physics test, despite my honest efforts), mathematics, and politics; sports, automobiles, and technology in general (esp. computers, video games, and personal electronic gadgetry—I have never touched a “cordless” telephone, for example), agriculture, popular entertainment (such as The M&M’s), and reading music. There are likewise embarrassing gaps in my knowledge of poetry, the classics, philosophy and gardening. I cannot name birds, trees, or flowers, save a handful of only the most well-known species.

§ **June 16.** While walking down O’Farrell this morning, the sidewalks sticky with vomit, the plastic beer cups and overturned chairs brought to mind how a nightclub must appear the morning after, say, an Elvis Presley concert. The gentleman curled up next to our car could be the bartender, a bouncer, a passed-out groupie, or The King himself.

When the 7:20 arrived, I hid behind a column, boarding the next bus at 7:30. This time the ride across the bay was relatively peaceful, although I was obliged to sit next to a filthy window.

Jeronimus Alley in Berkeley, down which I walk some soggy mornings in order to observe earthworms in their native puddles, has been paved over with asphalt. While still retaining some of its pastoral quality (one must squint while holding one’s hands over the ears), the alley is less pleasant than it used to be; I shall walk down it no more.

Herr Von Bunko said Crispin Glover’s speech is an affectation, because he didn’t want to sound like anyone else. I admire the way he never speaks unless spoken to, and then gives delayed, quivering responses. I always wished I could speak the way actors in old Hollywood films spoke; they were given lessons in diction, which gave them half-British sounding accents (William Powell and Bette Davis come to mind). I have experimented with different voices, but haven’t settled on anything, yet. Speaking to other human beings usually causes me so much anxiety all I can do is blurt out whatever first comes to mind in my annoying nasal vernacular.

§ **June 20.** Up at 5:45. I took the train with Lucie, transferring to a crowded airport shuttle at Millbrae while she continued down the Peninsula. The shuttle dropped me off at some godforsaken, abandoned part of the airport; when I went inside everything was boarded up and there were no people about. I tried to find out where I was at an information kiosk, but the computer froze when I pressed the space bar. Luckily, I did manage to find my way to the inhabited part of the terminal. After a fifteen-minute wait in line, I was made (like everyone else) to remove my shoes, velvet coat and belt, walk through a metal detector, then submit to additional security measures by a fellow who looked better suited for a life of violent crime. “We must be doin’ something right because the public is *thanking* us,” boasted the would-be mass murderer while glancing my way, as if fishing for a compliment.

I arrived at the gate with two hours to spare. Since I wouldn’t be dining until after take-off, I purchased a hot dog, a banana, and a Tropicana-brand apple juice (served lukewarm), which dribbled down my chin due to a poorly-designed plastic bottle. My ad-libbed meal was disturbed by a ragamuffin who started shaking my row of seats while her mother shouted from the snack bar, “Do you want a muffin?” “No!” shrieked the brat. “Do you want a bagel?” “Noooooooooo!” she shrieked again, while stamping her feet with her eyes closed. I surveyed the room, wondering who I would be imprisoned with on the plane. A bored teenaged boy with a “Dirty Niggaz” t-shirt used his armrest as a drum, *pat-a-pat-a-pat-a-pat*; a Tammy Faye Bakker look-a-like muttering to herself while swiveling back and forth in her seat; an obese man suffering a coughing fit; a gum-smacking teenaged girl, all possible cell-mates.

I have a horror of public restrooms, and the ones at the airport are no exception. My toilet kept flushing repeatedly as I sat upon it, then didn’t flush after I had gotten up; meanwhile, I knocked over a stack of half-spent toilet paper rolls, two of which rolled into the next stall, occupied by a fellow who was talking on his portable telephone amidst the sickening racket of the men’s room! I was mortified, but thankfully he didn’t acknowledge the mishap.

Back in the waiting area, I approached a table covered in every conceivable dreary magazine for the traveling banker or stock broker of colour: *The Economist* (Latin ed.), *Ebony*, *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Black Enterprise*, *Los Seis Continentes*, *Hispanic Business*, *Latin Finance*, *Latin Trade*, *Poder*, and those ubiquitous tabloids *Time* and *Newsweek*, both in Spanish for some reason. I don’t usually read magazines anyway, but I wouldn’t have minded flipping through the latest *Vanity Fair* or *Vogue* while

waiting to board the plane, as I find it difficult to concentrate when I'm anxious. As I looked around the room, people were actually reading those rags (it pays to supply one's own reading material), although one woman was reading something called *110%: 110 Strategies for Feeling Great Every Day*. I chose a seat on the far side of the room where I would be undisturbed, but was immediately followed by an obese gentleman carrying several giant suitcases while holding his boarding pass and identification in his mouth, like a dog. He dropped everything behind me with a groan, and when he sat down the whole row of seats trembled. I tried to ignore him, but then he produced, from God only knows where, a greasy bag of Egg McMuffins, which stank of bacon, grease, and condiments. He made all sorts of chomping, smacking, and licking sounds; just as I thought I was going to go mad, an unctious voice over the public address system boomed something like, "Customer [something unintelligible which sounded like Huhn Huh], please pick up the white courtesy telephone, Huhn Huh" at a ridiculously high volume. A woman nearby covered her ears it was so loud, while others looked at each other and laughed. Despite this easily remedied human error, it was not turned down; every few minutes, another ear-splitting announcement would commence, "Customer Huhn Huh, please pick up the white courtesy telephone, Huhn Huh, Huhn Huh, Huhn Huh..." shattering my nerves but momentarily drowning out the Egg McMuffin person.

Upon boarding, I couldn't find room for my small 40s-era Paul Bunyan suitcase; as there were people rudely pressed against me in both directions, all I could do was sit down with my suitcase in my lap and hope a stewardess would find a place for it. Finally, someone moved their suitcase and I shoved mine in. After the smarmy lesson on how to fasten and unfasten one's seat belt (who has never used a seat belt?) and a dozen loud commercials, the in-flight movie began, which I think was called *Chicago*; its constant jump-cut editing created a strobe light effect. I tried to watch it for a moment but the camera never stayed still for one second, which gave me a migraine. Its scenes of aerobic exercises looked tiresome anyway. For the duration of the flight, the occupant of the seat in front of me kept pushing backwards harder and harder, as if he were trying to recline all the way back until our faces met, upside down; meanwhile the fellow behind me began to stab into my back with his pointed kneecaps as if trying urgently to wound me. The juvenile with the "Dirty Niggaz" t-shirt sat between me and his father; he had a particularly gruesome scar the length of his right forearm; I stole fascinated glances at it throughout the flight.



During the facsimile meal, a toddler somewhere behind me began screaming at the top of her lungs; an old man shouted, “Quiet!” but to no avail. The mother took the little horror for a walk down the aisle; when they stopped next to me the tot started throwing a tantrum. When the mother picked her up, the child’s leg swung out, accidentally kicking me in the jaw. Fortunately it didn’t hurt, but it was quite a shock, as I had retreated into a trance-like state, chewing my apple without swallowing and staring at the pattern on the seat cushion only one millimeter from my eyes. To add insult to injury, the flight attendant elbowed me in the head twice while pouring people’s drinks. The Dirty Niggaz youngster didn’t play drums once; he slept almost the whole flight and was otherwise very still and quiet but for the tinny racket of his headphones.

Upon my arrival in Toronto, I took a shuttle bus to the Quality Hotel west of downtown. On the way I had a dry chat with a librarian from Walla Walla, Washington; how I abhor small talk (she initiated it), but being the chap that I am there was little I could do without insulting her. After checking in and tossing my things in my room, I dined down the street at Bombay Palace (chosen because I was weary and it was the only restaurant open within several blocks), one of those places where they turn the tablecloths over rather than wash them, but the food really was rather good and the music authentic. After dinner I was given a moist, warm “towelette”, wrapped in cellophane for freshness, which is exactly what one wants after a long day of travel; I practically gave myself a bath right there at my table while waiting for the check (which in Canada is called the ‘bill,’ which makes perfect sense). After talking to Father and then Lucie on the telephone, I watched French-language programs on the picture box until 2:50 a.m. I find Canadian French much easier to understand than the Parisian dialect—it almost sounds like Americans speaking French.

§ **June 21.** The doors at this hotel (as at many hotels now) are metal and when shut, slam noisily with a resounding metallic thud; the people in room 515 (next door to me) and their friends down the hall in 512 spent the entire night going back and forth between their rooms, slamming the door each time, sometimes standing in the hall talking loudly (the elevator is just around the corner). I opened my door at 2:15 and overheard one of the group say, “I don’t know, we’re just trying to find Kristen...God, you’re such an *asshole*, Scott.” Later, I called the front desk to complain of the continual racket; an affable Indian assured me he would come right up and speak to

the inconsiderate revelers. Moments later, I heard loud voices in the hall; when I opened my door, a barefoot, wasted frat guy who I assumed was Scott approached me and asked, “Are you alone?”

“What the deuce is going on out here!?” I blinked.

“Is Kristen in there?” He tried to enter my room but I stood in his way.

“I don’t know who that person is, now go away, I’m trying to get some shut-eye!”

The desk clerk awakened from his momentary stupor and stepped forward, gesturing and stammering. After realizing his mistake, Scott, reeking of spirits, patted me on the back and apologized. After I shut the door, the din soon subsided and I slept soundly until 9:00.

After spending the morning at the convention center, doing whatever one does at conventions, I grew bored and decided to explore the city (remember, a *bored* person is a *boring* person). Like other Canadian cities I’ve visited, Toronto is spotlessly clean—I noticed the trash bins are locked and accessible by only a narrow slot, making it impossible for people to dig through them (a common sight in San Francisco). I walked up Yonge Street (pronounced *Young*), which reminded me a little of Philadelphia’s South Street, but more interesting, and much longer. I studied the crowds carefully (my dark sunglasses are perfect for people watching), paying close attention to their clothes, their posture, their bodies, their make-up, their mannerisms, &c. I was surprised at how *white* it is here, but after all I’ve come from the Barbary Coast. There were a few panhandlers, sitting quietly on their corners holding signs or cups; some asked for money but politely, without a song or dance. On one block several religious fanatics vied for my attention; I then manoeuvred skillfully through a throng of Harry Potter fanatics in full costume, who were thrusting flyers in people’s faces (I think there’s a new book). A disheveled, wrinkled sad sack of a man suddenly lost control of his bag of fast food, which he juggled wildly before dropping his burger upside-down on the sidewalk; I mumbled a sympathetic *oops* as I walked by. I’ve only been here 36 hours, but the people here appear to me to be friendly, laid back, and a bit on the wholesome side. It was warm today and people dressed accordingly (I was the only one wearing a suit), but I saw none of the appalling fashion trends from home, such as pants worn around the knees, or clothes several sizes too big. Canadian women look essentially the same as Americans, but they somehow seem more feminine and sexy without appearing slutty.

After visiting several bookstores, I eventually tired of the never-ending Yonge Street which seemed to stretch to the horizon, so I turned on Bloor, returning on Church, inadvertently stumbling upon Toronto's equivalent of the Castro, which was teeming with homosexuals. I imagine Percy could have told me a few stories about this neighborhood. For the first time today I saw a *real* restaurant (where do people *eat* here, besides Harvey's, McDonald's, Kentucky-Fried Chicken, and Taco Bell?), an attractive little bistro, but the menu didn't appeal to me. I'm sure there are many good restaurants in Toronto, but wandering the city aimlessly for four hours is not the most effective way to find them. I eventually ended up at a rather pleasant pub called the Irish Embassy, not unlike Foley's at home but nicer, located in an old Victorian bank, with original marble floors and high, ornate ceilings. I stuffed myself on the company's dime, then meandered back to my room, spending the rest of the evening reading, watching more French-language programs, with its generous nudity. Lucie called and we spoke for an hour; she said the patio sale was a flop today, which makes me glad, as I really dislike the people in our building.

§ **June 22.** I went to the convention center at 10:00 with good intentions, but fled immediately and went to the Art Gallery of Ontario, where I bumped into Mitchell and Petra. It was nice to know that Mitchell wasn't spending all his time at the convention, as he seems to take work so seriously. We spoke for about fifteen minutes; Mitchell said they were going to take the train to Niagara Falls before returning home. We made tentative plans to see a movie at the Stanford or the Paramount soon.

The gallery is home to many very pretty things indeed; I quite liked two small canvases by F. S. Challener, called "Papillons" and "Libellules." Besides being pleasantly surprised by Augustus John's 1919 portrait of the Marchesa Casati, I otherwise saw nothing compelling. Canadian painting, at least that which I saw today, seems to be largely informed by European tradition (although Jack Chambers' "401 towards London, No. 1", which I was attracted to immediately, is distinctively American, or shall I say, North American; I know of no European counterpart to this kind of painting), while American painting seems much more insular, but more innovative. The modern room included works by Warhol, Close, and Segal, all of which bored me (especially the dreadful minimalist works) except for Claes Oldenburg's flabby "Giant Hamburger"—his work always amuses and disgusts. The exhibit of Canadian Tom Thompson's landscapes interested me not in the least, nor

did the Henry Moore wing filled with his glorified blobs. As with literature and popular music, there is little art I admire created after the early '30s.

After the art gallery, I promenaded up Spadina to Bloor. It was another warm, sunny day, without shade; I finally took refuge in a pub called the Regal Beagle where I had a sandwich and several glasses of water. The Bata Shoe Museum was next door; after a quick tour of it I decided to explore the district east of Jarvis. After walking through Allan Gardens, I turned south down St. George, which turned out to be a mistake, as the neighborhood had assumed a decidedly unwholesome character. I was quite nervous until I found my way back to Jarvis.

I arrived back at my room at 4:30, then took a shower to cool off. I read Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* for a while, then watched a CBC program called "What the World Thinks of America," which was based on a poll in which people from dozens of countries were asked questions such as, "Would you rather live in America or your own country?" or "Do America's economic policies improve life in your country or make it worse?" The answers were predictable. I have always thought the cartoon character Baby Huey best personified the U.S., a gentle, good-natured dimwit who, when crossed, can be a formidable foe, smashing everything in sight, except Baby Huey was always remorseful afterward. After watching a demolition derby of school buses on a figure-eight track, followed by *Angèle* (1934) without subtitles, I went to bed at 1:30.

§ **June 23.** Up at 9:00. I notice my hair is rapidly turning gray, which I actually don't mind. Lunch at a subterranean food court under the Royal York, then above ground to wait for Father. He and Matthias arrived in a red convertible; I hopped in (one hops into convertibles) then we shuffled off to Buffalo. Father was nervous about driving in the city; I played navigator until we made our way to the QEW. Once at home, we spent the day relaxing in the air conditioning and talking about old times. Fajitas for dinner; to bed at 10:00.

§ **June 24.** Slept until 10:00. After a quick luncheon of sandwiches, Father, Matthias, and I took the convertible to Niagara Falls. With the top down in the car, the brutal sun beat mercilessly upon my brow, giving me a most disagreeable *tan*. Father played me his favourite Alan Jackson CD as we cruised past countless abandoned factories, monuments to a forgotten

era when Buffalo was a thriving city. Niagara Falls was a remarkable sight; we walked throughout the entire park in order to view the phenomenon from every conceivable angle. We took an elevator to the foot of American Falls, where we were pummeled with mists; I searched the crowd for Mitchell and Petra's faces but didn't see them.

Back home at 5:00 for pizza 'n' wings—Miklos seemed incredulous when I told him I had never heard of pizza served with fried chicken. Before and after dinner there were many comings and goings—Father drove Miklos to his Navy meeting; Beatriz accompanied Matthias to a friend's graduation party; Father picked up Miklos from his Navy meeting then took him to work at Wilson Farms, &c. Eddie barks excitedly when the garage door opens, whimpering and rolling about, starved for love, as if he didn't get enough already. I picked up Missy and she hissed, unused to my touch. After Father and I were left alone, we went to Blockbuster, where we spent an hour choosing a movie; I asked the girl behind the counter for titles I knew they wouldn't have (why do I bother?)—Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu* ("How do you spell that?"), where do you shelve British comedy series, such as "The League of Gentlemen?" (after assuring her I'm *not* looking something called *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* she chirps, "Try the Special Interest section"; I look and there are only a dozen titles, most of them the uncensored "Jerry Springer" and "Cops," and a Tutankhamen documentary), or anything with Harold Lloyd in it. At last it's a toss-up between *Das Boot* (the director's cut—over three hours!) and *Cast Away*. At the last moment I notice the director's cut is dubbed (horrors!), so *Cast Away* it is. I actually rather enjoyed it; certain stories I find quite compelling—being stranded on a desert island, the last man on earth, going back (or forward) in time, being invisible. To bed at 1:30.

§ **June 25.** Up at 11:00. While getting dressed I almost shattered my watch when I stuck my hand in the ceiling fan. The air conditioner is broken, on this, the hottest day of the year. We spent the day in the Florida room, where the occasional feeble breeze kept the day from being unbearable, although Father and Beatriz seemed to suffer more than I. I tuned Matthias' guitar and taught him a few Throbbing Gristle riffs, then we went to a Dairy Queen which sells only ice cream and no food (what the Dickens!).

§ **June 26.** Up at 5:45 to say good-bye to Beatriz, who had to depart for work, then back to bed until 10:00. The air conditioning is still kaput,

so I was obliged to sleep in the Florida room, which was quite comfortable, although I was awakened twice by the sound of a passing locomotive and twice more by a gust of drizzle in my face; each time I was lulled back to sleep by the sound of the wind in the willows. I asked Matthias why they called it the 'Florida room' but he said he didn't know, and that nobody else he knows calls it that.

§ **June 27.** The flight home from Newark was among the most unbearable flights I have ever suffered. Rather than fill these pages with endless complaints, I shall recount merely the highlights. The woman and child who sat next to me brought onto the plane bags of McDonald's food, which smelled appalling. My grimace of disgust must have been evident because the woman mumbled an apology. Throughout the flight, she and her son switched places repeatedly, climbing over each other clumsily and with much grunting, then once seated, would not sit still for one second. The child, a precocious ten year-old, swung his headphones in the air like a diminutive Samson, danced in his seat, violently flipped through his Harry Potter book backwards without reading it, made machine gun noises (spraying spittle on my arm), raised and lowered his tray with a *bang*, and so on; his mother, with her ridiculous fake breasts, shook crumbs from her blanket, tickled my arm raw with the sleeve of her denim jacket, wrestled with a tabloid newspaper, and elbowed me while dealing playing cards. I would have rebuked them to settle down but for the equally irritating behaviour of the others around me. The trio behind me kept getting up, each time grabbing my seat instead of their own to steady themselves. Through much of the flight, a redneck stood in the aisle next to me with his backside in my face; as people squeezed by him, their filthy thighs and buttocks rubbed roughly against my shoulder. With more than an hour remaining, I finished the Zola book; to distract myself from the mob I scribbled disparaging remarks in *SkyMall Magazine*. Upon landing, I raced for the nearest taxi home and was in Lucie's inviting arms by 7:30.

*June 28. Bon anniversaire à moi.* It was a singularly warm day, which Lucie and I spent lolling about on the divan, fanning ourselves, while the cats panted on the kitchen floor. My sickly pallor, much diminished over the last week, is slowly beginning to return, much to my and Lucie's relief. The fog cooled things down in the afternoon, cascading over Twin Peaks as a terrible vast waterfall in slow motion, and we ventured forth to the grocer's, parasols in hand. Tuna steaks, spinach salad and fruit for dinner while watching

*Trouble in Paradise* (1932). To bed at 11:00.

§ **June 30.** At lunch I went to Pep Boys for new tires. After being helped by a chap named Manny (I resisted the urge to ask him if it was his real name), I wandered through the nightmarish, fluorescent maze of baffling automobile accessories—cobra-shaped lock knobs, magnetic bird poo and bullet holes, fuzzy steering wheel covers, logo splash guards, urinating cartoon character decals, self-adhesive scroll trim, Pep Boys bobble heads, bull bars, skid plates, bug deflector panels, and license plate frames which say, “I smile because I have no idea what’s going on.” While seated in the waiting area, I eavesdropped on a woman who was sobbing into a portable telephone, but all I could make out were the words, “You’re the one who keeps confrontating *me*.”

§ **July 1.** For reasons too prosaic to detail here, Lucie and I have declared war against our new building manager, a mistress of mediocrity, ill manners, and lies. We lay in the darkness until well after midnight trying to come up with ways of sabotaging her interests. This morning I set a particularly clever plan into motion, which is certain to send the horrid woman into paroxysms of embarrassment; however, it’s one of those plans to which one can never know the outcome.

After walking Lucie to the MUNI station, I returned some DVDs (*ach*, these acronyms, they hurt my eyes!), then watched in dismay as a crane pulled down what remains of the old Royal Theater to make way for another Starbucks or its satanic equivalent. Another gem of the Art Deco era just thrown away like so much rubbish! Polk Street Station for a tuna melt and ice cream soda while reading D’Aurevilly. As I read, I couldn’t help but be distracted by a booth of college students behind me talking enthusiastically about Kennedy assassination theories (as if the event itself had happened this morning), analyzing Scooby Doo (a cartoon dog from the ’70s) episodes, and arguing about which food is the sexiest (one fellow kept insisting it is hot dogs and doughnuts); it was like a scene from the film *Slacker*. I spent the rest of the afternoon answering correspondence, dusting objets d’art, and writing.

§ **July 3.** The night was punctuated by a series of deafening explosions set off in the streets by easily amused revelers; I prayed someone would blow

his own arm off, but after each detonation I heard not the hoped for screams of agony but instead car alarms and cheering, which continued in episodes until dawn. As a result, I partook in far fewer than the forty winks I had planned for the evening.

§ **July 5.** Up at 11:20, pie-eyed from exhaustion after being kept awake by “shock and awe” pyrotechnics, car alarms, and wailing klaxons. I stepped in cat vomit on the way to the water closet, then nearly fainted while dressing. Lucie and I spent the entire day reclining on the divan, her in a sheer negligée and I in my velvet smoking jacket, flipping channels and sipping Pastis. On Telemundo’s “Laura,” cheating husbands were dragged onto the stage where they were held down and beaten by their wives, then dragged again through the jeering audience, who slapped, punched, and kicked them while shouting epithets in Spanish. Later, we watched a smart and very funny Canadian film called *Last Night*, about how a group of people spent their last hours on Earth before it ended (we are not told why it’s going to end). I’d choose to spend my last night on Earth in Lucie’s arms, of course; if given two months’ notice, as those in the film had been, our plan would undoubtedly be to flee to Paris as quickly as possible, but after that I know not what. A terrible thing to contemplate! On one hand, as I desperately clung to those things which meant the most to me, there would also be the unavoidable notion that after we die there is nothingness, not even the memory of our most inestimable moments, so why bother? But I would bother, I would, because all we have is the “here and now,” and I prefer it to the void.

§ **July 6.** We were greeted at dawn by the pathetic sound of someone attempting to play “Reveille” on a trumpet; Lucie and I were supposed to have gone over to the Cool’s yesterday but it completely slipped our minds. Lucie called Jeffrey to apologize, using the excuse that we had a “previous engagement.” I accompanied Lucie to work in roaring fog and bone-chilling, gale force winds (ah, summer in San Francisco), but spent part of the morning running errands for sundries in Cole Valley. Moments after I wondered if I might encounter Annie or Alain, I did in fact end up in line at the boulangerie behind Alain, who had powdered sugar all over his vest. We didn’t make eye contact but I’m certain he saw me, although I can’t be sure if he recognized me. I certainly identified his trademark worn-out loafers. Lucie was rather alarmed to hear of the encounter (“*Bon dieu*, what if he *saw* you?”), but I reassured her that Alain already knows I exist, and that actually seeing me



changes nothing.

The city is pouring new sidewalks, using a cut-rate, ugly gray powder *sans* gravel, the miserly bastards. The work is done in a careless manner, as if by untrained prisoners in a work release program. How I loathe to step upon it!

§ **July 7.** *Parbleu!* At the risk of filling this journal with nothing but complaints about noise (or complaints in general, for that matter), I must say I am still miffed over the fool who kept shouting “Tony!” last night while we attempted to read. Sometimes I am so sick and tired of this heinous neighborhood, I want to pack our ’40s-era Paul Bunyan suitcases and abandon our rooms to the gibbering mob, but to where would we flee? I have an *idée fixe* that we’d be happy in Lawrence, Kansas, but I’m afraid of what we’ll find when we get there.

Jeffrey has invited us to a Django Reinhardt festival in Stern Grove (out by the zoological park, somewhere?), but we politely declined, as the idea of spending the afternoon outdoors under the withering sun (or swirling fog, as it may be) is considerably less appealing than staying at home and listening to Django Reinhardt records. I would happily spend time in our own garden, if we had one, but in general we are not “outdoor types,” nor are we “festival types,” for that matter.

§ **July 11.** This morning I used the washroom at the bus station. Behind me, the doorless stalls were all occupied by men with piles of garbage bags, squalid duffel bags, and lice-infested blankets; others lined up at the sinks to wash their carcasses. I imagined myself attacked from behind, hit over the head with a paper towel dispenser. The villain puts on my velvet coat and wristwatch then rifles through my wallet and satchel, pocketing my D’Aurevilly book, silver filigree art déco fountain pen and bottle of violet ink (which he later drinks), and Clicquot Club Eskimos disc, then tossing my journal into a urinal before kicking me in the mouth with a slimy athletic shoe. Even my hair is pulled out and sold to the wigmaker. The miscreant then assumes my identity for the morning, writing checks for a dozen giant television sets and a Buick before being caught when he misspells “Vodrázka.” What an vexatious way to start one’s day!

A late lunch at the Emeryville “food court”; I took the last seat at a wobbly, noodle-covered plastic table by the washrooms and a hidden speaker

through which throbbed crude jungle music. Honestly, I don't know why I eat at that trough. Upon my return to the office, Lucie had left me a message to take the online "Dante's Inferno" test, which, to avoid doing any real work, I took at once. To my relief, my score was the same as Lucie's—we are both to be banished to the sixth level of Hell, or the City of Dis (for heretics—much preferable to Arizona!). There was also a link to a "Personality Disorder Test," which we both took over the phone. Lucie is a paranoid histrionic narcissist, while I'm a classic avoidant paranoid narcissist, a good match, I think. I scored poorly in all the other areas, as well, except that of "borderline." How I should hate to be "borderline" anything!

The three hour-long telephone calls Lucie made to me in Toronto? \$188.40! That's highway robbery! It's a pity there is no way to swindle the phone company, or is there? I shall have to look into it.

§ **July 15.** While Lucie earned a living, I spent the day playing the scullery maid, scrubbing the kitchen floor, dusting, Hoovering, making the beds, and so on, all while singing (well, humming) along to the cheerful tunes of Mr. Boyd Rice. Late in the afternoon I took public transportation to Lucie's place of employment so I could escort her home. It's a dangerous four miles and I can't bear the thought of her squeezing her way through the pawing hordes, all alone and with nobody to protect her. Upon my arrival, I spotted her in the Union at a table with Jamie; Lucie had abandoned her desk to have tea with him. The three of us sat for another hour talking; Jamie is off next week to Berlin, then he's off to the Pays d'Oc to visit Nelly at her country abode. The very idea of a month in the French countryside was enough to cause Lucie and I to grow misty-eyed. Lucie has made Jamie promise to bring her a pair of espadrilles.

After we parted ways, Lucie and I spent an eternity in howling fog waiting for the 43, then when we got off at Geary we waited another half-hour for the 38, but gave up and took a taxi home. A salad of tomatoes, basil, and mozzarella for dinner while continuing to watch "The Adventures of Antoine Doinel"—tonight, interviews with our hero Jean-Pierre Léaud, excerpts from various French television programs, newsreels of the "Langlois Affair," footage of Truffaut's rally to shut down the Cannes Film Festival, &c. Long live the good chaps at Criterion!

§ **July 16.** I took the 4:25 bus home in order to avoid Bruno. It was a brand new bus with *metal* seats; I was tossed about like so much salad. AC Transit has achieved new heights of outrageous discomfort, although I might have instead suggested concrete benches with oars. On the way home from the bus station I stopped by Borders to look at a book on erotic illustrations of the 17th and 18th centuries (which I didn't buy but now I wish I had), then to Kayo Books where I purchased *Feu d'amour*, a collection of scantily clad dames smoking cigarettes, Grove Press' massive *Fille de joie* (a perfect copy!), and a book I had sold them several years ago, *The Girls from "La Vie parisienne"*. After Lucie walked though the door, we spent another evening with Antoine Doinel.

§ **July 17.** Lucie and I spent the afternoon lolling about, but eventually dressed ourselves and sallied forth into the bustling streets. After Lucie helped me pick out some sock suspenders at Wilkes Bashford, we proceeded to the BART station, where we were surprised by an actual musician, a violinist sawing away at a Bach partita, a great improvement over the usual bucket beaters and mechanical tap dancers. While feeding endless quarters into the ticket machine, which rejected every coin a dozen times before finally accepting it, an Oriental woman approached and stood impatiently between Lucie and I, but moved to another machine when I asked her if she cared to join us. We ascended from the bowels of the earth at Berkeley, then strolled along Shattuck, zig-zagging through pamphleteers pie-eyed with impossible ideals, clipboard-wielding pro-hemp activists, prostrate groups of 'gutter-punks', and the last zombie-like followers of the 'turn on, tune in, and drop out' era. I always feel ill-at-ease in Berkeley, half-expecting a mad throng of violent protesters to suddenly appear from around the corner or a disgruntled youth with a Zippo and a can of petrol to set himself ablaze in the name of some fatuous cause only he comprehends. To our relief we saw no nudists but I did observe a gentleman urinating into a styrofoam cup.

Presently we arrived at Pasand where Chimes was to join us at 5:30; however, he never showed up. Lucie and I feasted upon the best Madras cuisine I have ever eaten this side of the Ganges, then proceeded to walk up Bancroft to the Pacific Film Archive to see Kaurismäki's disappointing *Juha*; aside from one gentleman who kept making clucking noises and another who snored (but was almost immediately admonished by an employee), it was a remarkably well-behaved audience of Lesbians and serious film buffs who not only refrained from kicking my seat, fussing with portable telephones, or

eating, but even sat through the lengthy Finnish credits at the end without uttering a word. One had to see it to believe it.

§ **July 18.** Chimes never received my courriel, which we later discovered had been siphoned off into cyberspace by our company's new "spam" filter (but which still lets real spam through). On the way home from the office I stopped by the grocer's where I witnessed a drunken prostitute fall into a freezer, hitting her face on the edge of the freezer while her hand came down hard onto a box of popsicles, scattering them about; this while managing not to spill the beer in her hand. Lucie and I watched *La Maman et la putain* again, which remains one of our most cherished films. How I wish Criterion would release a "director's cut" on DVD with commentary, interviews, and so on—it would be a worthy addition to our small film library.

§ **July 22.** Lucie and I took the car to the dentist's to get our teeth cleaned. Dr. Wu did the honors himself; behind that chuckling façade the man is a sadist of the utmost gravity; afterwards, Lucie and I both fled, clutching our mouths in agony. After dropping Lucie off, I of course spent the rest of the morning looking for a parking space, finally ending up on Collins at Geary, taking the bus home. On board was an elderly gentleman in an out-dated MUNI uniform (complete with vintage accessories) who loudly called out each stop in several languages, which sounded something like this: "Next stop Fillmore, Japantown and the AMC Kabuki, the 22, sayonara señorita and Feliz Navidad, [something in Cantonese, then what sounded like fake Russian], no, and don't ask me again!" The other passengers chuckled nervously; an Oriental woman next to me kept looking at me and smiling as if to say, "Isn't he *adorable!*", but I stared straight ahead with an air of complete indifference while inside I was dying to get off the bus. As the gentleman had what seemed like an ordinary rapport with the driver, I couldn't decide if he was legitimate (perhaps a lonely retired MUNI employee or avid bus enthusiast) or simply a lunatic.

§ **July 25.** A dead whale has washed up at Ocean Beach; before the Park Service could dispose of the carcass, miscreants during the night covered the beast with graffiti, how horrid!

After picking Lucie up from the train station, we went home to dress then met Chimes, his friend Susan from Vancouver, Randolphe and his partner,

Herman at AsiaSF, a cabaret and restaurant featuring lip-synching “gender illusionists”. The herb salad was sublime, as was the filet mignon, but the crab cakes and porcupines were swimming in grease, and my *crème brûlée* was a disappointment, its crust a flabby skin of custard instead of the customary hardened shell. The entertainment wasn’t my cup of tea, but we did enjoy each other’s company.

§ **July 26.** It’s hard to believe half a gin and tonic would make me feel the way I did this morning. After finally crawling from bed while groaning and clutching my head, Lucie and I dressed then drove to Phoenix Optical in Berkeley where I purchased some vintage eyeglasses to replace my current ones of fifteen years; thick, black new “old stock” frames from the ’50s; Lucie also chose sunglasses for herself. After a splendid buffet at Pasand, we went to Laxis where Lucie inquired about having her Edwardian-era lace dress repaired, which Loulou had damaged with her claws—how she loves lace! We had hoped to see Carmella somehow, but she had plans of her own and so our paths did not cross.

§ **July 29.** Up at 11:30; spent the afternoon writing and listening to Beethoven, Mr. Darcy asleep in my lap. At dusk I left to meet Lucie; throwing all caution aside, I walked down O’Farrell, which was growing more sinister by the moment. Presently, an approaching crack addict spun around and aimed a karate kick at my head, which missed by inches. As our gazes met, I saw that the wretch had the eyes of a zombie, which seemed to stare through me—I wonder if he wasn’t attacking me but some imaginary foe immediately behind me. I quickened my pace and fortunately was not followed.

§ **July 30.** A sleepless night for both Lucie and me, due in part to a rare thunderstorm in the wee hours. After leaving the house at 6:30 we walked two blocks up the hill to Post in order to avoid any more hostilities from the natives. I spent the morning reading the British edition of *Esquire*, which is not surprisingly less intrepid than the American edition, despite the inclusion of several bare female breasts. This month’s issue featured an article on Christina Ricci, in which I learned, to my relief, that the alarming disappearance of her lovely curves was done intentionally for her rôle in *Prozac Nation*.

A tuna melt and potato salad at Lois the Pie Queen, a humble establishment in the colored neighborhood of Emeryville serving, not surprisingly, unerring pie of the highest caliber. Afterwards, it was too early to pick up my new eyeglasses, so I went to Pegasus Books and perused several poems of Mallarmé; the translations were poor, however, and I tossed the book down in disgust. The “college rock” emanating from hidden tweeters in the ceiling was such as to drive me from the store holding my ears; years ago I could count on hearing in any bookstore Vivaldi’s ubiquitous workhorse *The Four Seasons*, but these days anything goes, although I have yet to hear jungle music in a bookstore—the two milieus are mutually exclusive.

I generally avoid the “news” in all its forms, but a story in a newspaper on the floor of the bus caught my eye—U.S. Highway 666, beloved for its satanic moniker, has been renamed Route 491 by officious transportation officials in three states; even leaders of the Navajo Nation, always eager to please, endorsed the dubious change. This should cause a significant decrease in tourism to the region, for why else would anyone wish to visit such an uninhabitable place, than to say he drove down the Highway to Hell and lived to tell about it?

§ **July 31.** A gloriously gloomy day; after accompanying Lucie to Powell St. Station (stopping along the way at the cobbler’s, then Parfums Jacqueline), I spent the afternoon listening to Bach and lying prostrate on the chaise longue.

§ **August 1.** On the way to the bus depot this morning, I slipped on a Circuit City catalog and nearly fell in front of a group of students, one of whom giggled as if she had never in her life seen anything so hilarious. I kept walking without glancing abaft, wondering at their absurd appearance, as many of the youngsters were wearing their pants around their knees, perhaps they were laughing at each other and not at me?

What’s for breakfast? Sheep’s milk yogurt with *miel de lavande*, and *Thé des poètes solitaires* from Mariages Frères, while listening to *La Forza del destino* on the hi-fi. Chimes came to see me in my office to share the glorious news—Diane is quitting the company! He and I went to Pasand for lunch to celebrate this long hoped for occasion; Chimes gains the most from the blessed event because Diane was his superiour, however, I will be glad never to read one of her tedious memorandums ever again, nor endure her

complaints to turn down my opera music.

I have shaved my beard, prompting Bruno to ask on the bus home what happened to it, but instead of using the word 'beard' he used the appalling appellation 'flavour saver'. The journey itself left me faint with nausea; the bus pitched to and fro' with the intensity of a storm-tossed dinghy. Upon arrival at the bus terminal, I strolled to the train depot to meet Lucie; unbeknownst to me, her train had arrived moments before I did. We both waited for each other at opposite ends of the depot for a quarter of an hour before Lucie spotted me, my head buried in the oversized pages of the second issue of that elegant organ of élan, *Bloody Beautiful*. We immediately crossed the street to K&L, wherein we purchased for the Cools as a belated house-warming gift a bottle of Veuve Clicquot and for ourselves a bottle of Hendrick's Gin. While walking home, I repeatedly reached for my chin, experiencing what is known as 'phantom beard syndrome', not unlike the sensation felt by an amputee reaching for a limb which isn't there.

After stopping by the apartment to dress, Lucie and I met the Cools at an eatery of their choosing, an austere Polk Street delicatessen, then a Yeti-themed drinking establishment called The Bigfoot Lodge which featured an ill-hewn abominable snowman statue, cheap taxidermy, and a false fireplace. Throughout the evening, while sipping gin and tonics, Lucie and I questioned our own judgment for continuing to socialize with people with whom we have nothing whatsoever in common, who have nothing to teach us and who do not inspire us. Jeffrey chattered on about work between draughts of hard cider, while Sharon looked miserable; she continually complained about her job (or lack thereof—I could never really ascertain if she was temporarily unemployed or on hiatus from the university) but perked up when Lucie asked her what she would rather be doing; she replied that she had always wanted to be an "advocate" of some sort. In the meantime, a gentleman with two turntables and a microphone arrived, who proceeded to play records of '80s pop music at increasingly loud levels until we could no longer hear what Sharon was saying. Once outdoors, the conversation turned to music; I asked Jeffrey what kind of music he and Sharon liked. He replied that they listened to KFOG, which I knew to be a popular station of some sort, one which undoubtedly features the inane banter of a 'morning crew' followed by 'triple shots' of 'album rock', but when I asked what kind of music the station played, neither Sharon nor Jeffrey would give a straight answer! Before Lucie and I took a taxi home, we walked up to Van Ness to see the Cool's depressing new condominium, the interior of which was flooded with brilliant light from

a nearby billboard. Lucie stifled laughter as I put on my *lunettes de soleil*, as my eyes are particularly sensitive to fluorescent rays. During the grand tour of the premises, I was able to survey the Cool's collection of LPs which included those of Bobby McFerrin, Quarterflash, and a compilation of Strauss waltzes. I can only surmise they are ashamed of their tastes in music, and I cannot say that I blame them.

§ **August 2.** Up at the ungodly hour of 9:00, whereby Lucie and I hastily dressed then took the F to the Castro; at Powell Street Station we were greeted by a saxophonist who honked a halting rendition of "If I Only Had a Brain"; meanwhile, a huckster was busy separating a group of Scandinavian tourists from their money by charging them to enter the platform through an unguarded employees' entrance. After a quick sprint underneath Market Street we emerged at Castro Station, then climbed the few blocks to the top of Beaver Street, where Randolphe greeted us with a shouted, "Hi!" He produced a key from his pocket, and moments later Lucie and I were rolling towards Mountain View in his truck, the personalized license plates and bumper stickers of which indicates the driver is a homosexual of the 'bear' variety, which made me feel not a little self-conscious. Before picking up the bookcase from Lucie's office, we stopped at Draeger's where Lucie purchased the store's entire stock of her favourite flageolet beans, unavailable in the city for some reason.

After delivering the bookcase to our apartment and returning Randolphe's truck, we took the bus home on which Lucie and I sat across from a couple with matching spider tattoos on their thumbs who were engaged in a row; the gentleman, obviously under the influence of a narcotic, slumped in his seat under the weight of several plastic grocery bags filled with boxes of Cheerios as his companion, on whose tight t-shirt was written the word 'TROUBLE' in sequins, chided him for wrongfully accusing her of receiving a phone call from a strange man (strange to him, not to her). After the quarrel abated, the woman mumbled oaths and shook her head self-righteously as the man stared dumbly at my shoes. Presently, the woman uttered a loud, "Ulp!" then began flailing her arms; I looked up to see a stream of blood flowing from her nose and onto her t-shirt. Her countenance was one of panic; her partner became suddenly animated, urging her to lean back in her seat. Fortunately, the bus stopped at Van Ness and Lucie and I bolted out the door.

Later, Lucie sent me to the corner store for some limes. While waiting



to cross the street, a disreputable-looking man approached with a woman of the gutter and barked at me, “Yo, Superman!” Of course, I ignored him (admittedly, I was standing arms akimbo, the way Superman often did, and my ’50s-era eyeglasses are not unlike those of Clark Kent), but he continued, “Hey, Clark Kent!” as I urgently tried to make the light turn green by means of telekinesis; finally, the light did turn green, and as we crossed the street together I overheard the woman say, “Maybe he don’t understand you,” to which the Negro replied, “Maybe I plant my *foot* in his ass he understand *that*.” Auspiciously, Ahmed greeted me in front of his store, and I escaped inside. Spaghetti for dinner while watching Clouzot’s *The Wages of Fear* (1953); to bed at 1:00.

§ **August 4.** There appears to be a sort of ongoing contest at my place of paid employment, whereby my colleagues, in what I can only surmise is a collective gesture of corporate defiance, routinely try to dress as casually as possible. In the spirit of conviviality, I joined in the fun today by wearing my comfy velvet smoking jacket and a silk paisley ascot, but was sadly outdone by a software programmer in terrycloth robe and rubber “flip-flop” footwear and a technical support specialist in a revealing gymnasium costume; both seemed not to even notice my venture to kick with the fray. I shall have to try harder next time, but what to wear? Later, I realized my actions were nothing more than a rueful attempt to “fit in”, something I have never been able to do successfully despite occasional half-hearted efforts.

During dinner, a persistent fire alarm caught my attention; when I looked out the kitchen window, I realized the building next door was in flames. Moments later, its roof was swarming with firemen; one had a flaccid hose from which water gushed in half-hearted spurts, one of which doused the captain in the face. Another produced a chainsaw and began sawing apart the structure which contained the elevator mechanism. Part of me hoped the building would burn to the ground, thus eliminating a constant source of clamor as well as an obstacle to what would otherwise be a splendid view of the downtown skyline. Alas, the edifice still stands; it’s ten o’clock and one of its tenants is playing “Who Let the Dogs Out?” at a volume the deaf could appreciate.

§ **August 5.** I awoke humming “Who Let the Dogs Out?” On the way to the corner store for celery I was nearly assaulted by a Negro wielding a pram above his head and shouting oaths, behaviour which went largely

unnoticed by passers-by. I shuddered to think what happened to the baby within.

To-day I received in the mail a four-disc anthology, “The Roaring Twenties”, purchased at auction. Although nearly ruined by being “reprocessed with Waves’ PS22 StereoMaker software” (whoever devised such an evil thing should be hanged), there were over a dozen excellent songs worth keeping for my collection, including a fine rendition of “At Sundown”, performed by Harry Reser’s Clicquot Club Eskimos. Although a Luddite at heart, my love music and film has made it necessary to own a hi-fi stereo, complete with electric turntable and recordable compact-disc deck, a videocassette tape recorder, an “all region” DVD player (for those French documentaries), and a rather hideous gray plastic television set. My wife and I also use a personal computer which makes it possible for us to work at home as well as research our interests—thanks to the ‘internet’ it is unlikely I would have ever discovered *Bloody Beautiful* magazine, for example, or made the acquaintance of several fine chaps with whom I correspond regularly.

Thanks to our VCR, we were able last night to watch the fascinating film, *The 28th Instance of June 1914, 10:50 a.m.*, which documents the lives of MacDermott & MacGough, gentlemen who have renounced the present in order to indulge their affection for the past, dressing and living the part to extremes. After looking in what I believed to be plausible sections a the video store, I was irritated to discover the film was filed under “Gay Interest”. Certainly, MacDermott & MacGough are homosexuals of the finest caliber, but that is not their sole *raison d’être*.

§ **August 9.** Lucie and I went to the matinée of *Le Divorce*, an amusing little film we quite enjoyed. Oddly, the audience consisted largely of the elderly, who, incidentally, know how to conduct themselves in a theater; Lucie and I weren’t disturbed once. As soon as the film ended, everyone left *en masse*, leaving Lucie and I alone to read the credits, which, to my surprise, included Léos Carax as a lyricist on one of the songs on the soundtrack; unfortunately I missed the title of the song. We took our luncheon at Café Bastille, then, as Lucie wasn’t feeling well, spent the rest of the day at home watching a couple of Whit Stillman films—*Metropolitan* and *The Last Days of Disco*.

§ **August 13.** Lucie and I were kept awake by the mad trombonist, whose repeated single-note blasts continued into the night. Piano (played properly and at a correct hour), I wouldn't mind, nor the 'cello, but in my neighborhood we have the mad trombonist, an amateur harmonica player, and the chap who simulates a drum kit with mop buckets.

Despite being ill again, I went to the office. Luncheon at the Bay Café Hofbrau; in Chapter IX of *Jane Eyre*, Jane spends a last night with Helen Burns, who dies of consumption; tears welled in my eyes as I chewed my tuna melt sandwich. I look forward to my midday meal where I get most of my reading done. Reading on the bus often makes me nauseated, and lately Lucie and I have spent an inordinate amount of time watching films lately, which often end so late there is no time to read in bed. Tonight we watched Noah Baumbach's *Kicking and Screaming* and *Mr. Jealousy*, after having seen his hilarious *Highball* the day before. All our favourite films would have done well as plays—little action (and no gratuitous car chases, please!) but heavy dialogue with an emphasis on human relationships. How I would loved to have been a filmmaker, but that involves work, and lots of it; I'll have to remain content as a film buff, one who is “enthusiastic and knowledgeable about film.”

§ **August 14.** After a luncheon of chicken broth, I had regained enough strength to accompany Lucie to Sûr La Table for some ramekins; after parting ways at Powell Street Station, I spent the rest of the afternoon at home reading *Jane Eyre*. The news is all about the blackout in the Northeast—how I should love to live without electricity! Of course, shaving my moustache would simply be out of the question, as only my electric razor can do the job with the required sensitivity. Our building has no gas, therefore we would have to take all our meals out, which could become rather expensive. I would also have to pick up a Victrola and start collecting 78's again; and viewing films could be a problem, as art house theaters are disappearing at an alarming rate. However, there are always books to read.

Whatever tranquility I may have ordinarily enjoyed this afternoon was certainly extinguished by the constant pop of Snappers from the playground behind our building. I have written numerous letters to the Director of the establishment, who assured me the irritants would be disallowed, but that evidently has not happened. Walking around the corner to see for myself, I witnessed a chubby little brown-skinned lad throwing Snappers on the ground absent-mindedly; before him were hundreds of spent ones.

§ **August 20.** It is my habit to sit near the back of the bus so as not to be disturbed as I read, for the front of the bus is oft populated with animated passengers who confabulate in a most noisome manner. This morning my ruse failed, as a Lesbian, dressed as a paper boy, sat in the back row and commenced to smack her gum machine-gun fashion—*smack smack smack smack*—shattering my nerves in an instant and making it impossible to focus on *Jane Eyre*. I moved to the center of the bus, roughly equidistant from the appalling racket behind me and the inane banalities before me; thus I was able to maintain a modicum of concentration. However, my attempts to block out all outside distractions were so successful that I missed my stop, only realizing my error after the bus had turned into Gilman St. While walking the several blocks back to my office, I found abandoned near the curb a crude Virgin, painted in garish colours on the detached seat of a wooden chair. I picked up the piece of dismal folk art and later gave it a prominent place in Chime's office, where it is sure to please.

Upon entering my own office, it was evident to me that someone, the cleaning staff no doubt, has been using my portable hi-fi on which to listen to God only knows what stripe of low music; I must remember to hide it before I leave each afternoon. After turning my personal computer on, I removed downstairs to the employee break room, where, upon a table in the corner, I spied my miniature cardboard Arc de Triomphe, given to me as a birthday greeting by Lucie some years ago. It must have fallen out my office window, but why did nobody bother to return it to me, as my name is written on the back of it? Being a separate fragile piece, its French flag was missing, but to my relief I quickly located it in the parking lot below the window of my office.

§ **August 21.** Lucie has cut her hair in a darling '20s bob! Upon her return from the beauty salon, the two of us took the car to Berkeley where we strolled down College Ave. At Tail of the Yak I purchased a facsimile edition of a Victorian-era pamphlet on penmanship containing information I have been in search of for some time. After dropping off Lucie's lace dress at Lacis to be repaired, we spent the rest of the afternoon at Carmella's; the three of us later went to a sporting goods warehouse in El Cerrito to see if they had any floor mats for Lucie to practice her ballet steps at home, but they did not; then to Bucci's for dinner.

§ **August 22.** Still ill; I suffer from a malady of the gut. I have made an appointment with a Dr. Chao; I find it somewhat alarming that when doing a physician search at the Aetna web site, one may narrow the search by any language *except* English, my language of choice when being diagnosed. Fortunately, I've some Chinese, so the two of us will probably manage to communicate on some fundamental level, assisted by pantomime and a good Pinyin dictionary. I was able to make myself understood to Dr. Chao's receptionist (who, despite her poor English skills still managed to be rude) by simplifying my speech to utterances of single words, although it remains to be seen if she has spelled my name correctly.

After a luncheon of chicken broth, saltines, and a banana, I spent the afternoon napping, reading, answering correspondence, and watching MTV's fascinating but nearly unwatchable "Cribs", a nature program on the nesting habits of *nouveau riche* pop stars, on mute while listening to Marini's *Curiose & moderne inventioni*.

§ **August 25.** Lucie and I have not left the house since Thursday, as both of us continue to be indisposed and are in no condition to brave the outside world. I have not shaved and thus resemble an outlaw; I also missed my appointment with Dr. Chao, which perhaps was a mistake. I have neglected my correspondence, have written nothing, and have even set aside *Jane Eyre* in favour of the television. I suppose one would say I was in the doldrums, which the record heat has done nothing but exacerbate; for a week it has been necessary for Lucie and I to sleep under wet towels, as air conditioning is uncommon here.

§ **August 26.** The plumber was summoned to replace the wax seal under our toilet; one could not ask for a more prosy task. I continue to consume nothing but chicken broth; I have not the strength nor the inclination to rise from the divan, a rather Proustian predicament but without the great literature, of which I have so far been incapable. jp align="left

§ **August 27.** I'm still ill, but have managed to drag myself to the office, where I am consuming sheep's milk yogurt with *miel de lavande* and my favourite *Thé des poètes solitaires*. I have little intention of doing any work, but as I have been out of the office for nearly a week, certain unpleasant tasks await my immediate attention. This weekend I have discovered Trollope, in

the form of a brilliant Masterpiece Theater production of “The Way We Live”—I heartily anticipate the other three installments and plan to seek out his novels as soon as I am finished reading *Jane Eyre*. The media is Mars mad this week; last night I looked for it but alas it was foggy. Who cares anyway; I saw the damned thing about a month ago, and it’s not like it’s not there every single night, foggy or not—it’s a planet, for God’s sake.

Luncheon at Ozzie’s on College Ave., an old-fashioned lunch counter, complete with soda fountain, which has by some miracle withstood the onslaught of progress (e.g. it hasn’t been “updated” or replaced by a Quizno’s). I sat at the Formica counter, on a red glitter naugahyde stool, where my order was taken by a polite young gentleman who was also the cook. My vanilla coke was soda water, with cola and vanilla syrup added; after I had tasted it, the cook asked me if the mix was alright. Meanwhile, classical music wafted from a nearby radio at levels which made normal conversation permissible. The experience was a miracle, really; this is how all lunch counters should be (and once were, long ago). It’s not a recreation of an old-fashioned lunch counter (lacking the requisite patina), rather it was a well-preserved one, which makes all the difference. I shall make every effort to return regularly, although it’s located on the other side of Berkeley.

I met Lucie at the train depot; on the way home we went into Anthropologie, which is really a wonderful store but for the S.W.A.T.-style portable radios the staff uses to communicate with each other. One’s pleasant shopping experience is frequently interrupted by loud bursts of static followed by ear-splitting requests for SKU numbers and help at the counter. I find it hard to believe the management could get everything right but for this one detail.

§ **August 28.** Bus fares are increasing on the first of the month; this morning when I went to purchase my bus pass I was made to stand in a ridiculously long queue of penny-pinchers, each overheard to request ten passes—the limit per customer. My time is worth much more to me than any possible savings obtained by buying bus passes in bulk; I could have spent these ten minutes with Jane and Mr. Rochester at Thornfield-Hall, instead I had to listen to the tinny pulse of aerobic dance music rattling from everyone’s headphones. Two ticket windows were open, but for some reason there was only one queue, which stopped short well over ten feet from the nearest window; the result was one long queue which impeded the movement of hordes of morning commuters who were obliged to squeeze through with

mumbled pardons the queue which instead of curving around the wall, thrust into the center of the terminal. Why not two shorter queues, one for each window? That's how it used to be, but the behaviour has changed; I've seen this phenomenon at Walgreens, where one queue serves several cashiers, often resulting in mass confusion and frayed tempers; it's done to save space, of course (so there is more room for the "Godfather of Soul" bobble-head displays), but it's unnecessary at a spacious bus terminal. `jp align="left`

§ **August 29.** An enormous tour bus has parked on our street, ripping a branch from a young walnut tree recently planted near the curb. I left an angry note on the windshield of the bus, but what's the use?

I have forgotten why I stopped selling books on eBay; today I spent the afternoon packing a pile of books, wrapping each one in newspaper, searching for the correct size of padded envelope or box, addressing each package in meticulous calligraphy, filling out customs forms, and so on, followed by a trip to the post office, which always takes forever. I undercharged my customers for postage, too, forgetting how expensive it has become to mail a book, especially overseas. (I recently ordered a book from Australia, a biography of the Marchesa Casati, the postage for which cost more than the book itself.) Despite the inconvenience of it all, I am happy to receive of late a steady flow of income from the sales, which I in turn use to fuel my recently acquired baroque music habit.

§ **August 30.** Lucie and I were ready to take a taxi to Jeffrey's party (which we had promised to attend long ago), but just as we were walking out the door, Jamie called for directions, so we ended up riding with him. Jamie seems odd lately, a bit preoccupied; naturally I wonder if he doesn't like us any more. I don't think he had a very good time in France this month; I wonder if there is some trouble in his life he hasn't told us about?

Jeffrey's party was attended chiefly by friends of Sharon, all of whom dressed exactly like her—Polo-style shirts tucked into well-worn trousers, canvas belts, and black athletic shoes. I felt uncomfortably over-dressed; then to my embarrassment, I actually introduced myself to the same person twice. When Sharon offered me a drink, I asked for half as much red wine as she gave Lucie but she must not have heard me; I instead received a 12-oz. plastic cup filled to the brim. Lucie and I began to "mingle", attempting to engage those around us in conversation but all anyone seemed to want to talk about

was work. One woman in particular named Darlene nearly put us to sleep with the endless details of her library's budget for a new building. "Yes, but do you have any other interests?" One imagines her fussing with figures in bed until midnight, surrounded by piles of documents, binders, and empty Dasani water bottles.

There was no music; when Lucie asked if we could put on some music, Jeffrey said, "Go right ahead," then made mumbled excuses for his "bad" music collection. Amongst the The Eagles, Santana, and Foreigner, I found the album of Strauss waltzes and put it on for laughs, but no one noticed my musical jest. Presently I found a Django Reinhardt disc (it must have been a gift) and played it; the effect on the party was immediate, people began laughing and appeared to be suddenly having a good time. Lucie and I took a seat on a futon sofa on the other side of the room, near two elegantly-dressed elderly ladies. The four of us hit it off right away; I have always enjoyed the company of old people, for some reason. The older lady talked about her stroke and how she lost much of her memory; she remembers nothing of her children, who had to introduce themselves to her, nor her years as mayor of the town of C—. She knew Sharon because she had helped her run for office in the '70s. She had a great sense of humour about her memory loss; she pointed to the other lady, her friend of thirty years, and said with a pretend scowl, "But I remembered *her*." I made them both laugh (which is fortunate, because in retrospect I felt my comment in questionable taste) when I said, "Yes, but did she remember you?" Because they were retired, not once did either of them bring up the dreaded subject of *work*, but of course these ladies come from a generation of people who know how to have a conversation, now an art almost extinct.

Lucie and I left early, stopping by Gramophone on the way home to rent *Quartet*, an early James Ivory effort, and Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta*. When we asked about Eustache's *Le Père Noël a les yeux bleus*, the gentleman behind the counter had actually heard of it; it's so nice when video store employees know what you're talking about. When I also asked why *Italian for Beginners* was shelved in the Italian and not the Danish section, he remarked, "It was probably misfiled by one of the morons who work here." Whew!

§ **September 2.** The new washing machines in the basement are of the front-loading variety; residents in our building misuse the soap trays, so our clothes are now often spotted with excess soap. The machines are smaller, which means we need to do more loads; and our whites are no longer



cleaned to our satisfaction. Furthermore, special debit cards are now required in lieu of coins, which would be a convenience if they worked; the cards are often rejected, instead of the value of the card the machine displays the flashing letters “ERR” for “error”. When this happens the card loses \$1.25 in value. One can only fill out a form and wonder when what’s-her-face will get around to doing something about it. Still, I’d rather have “ring around the collar” than patronize the dark, graffiti-filled Laundromat across the street. Someday, we’ll live in a proper house and we’ll have our own washing machine—*one’s own washing machine*, ah! the American dream. And we can hang our clothes on the line to dry!

The buffet at Star India for lunch, which used to be quite reliable but now is not (perhaps we came too late in the day). But the proprietor is as friendly as ever; when I asked him about the peppers used in the spicy chicken, he explained to us how he used a mild version of the recipe, which in India uses peppers so hot, if you ate but a tiny piece, “smoke will billow from every hole in your body.” A terrible thought but I couldn’t help laughing because of the way he said it. On the way home, we stopped in Mitchell’s for an ice cream cone. The vanilla had vanilla bean specks; being my favourite I ordered it, but it didn’t taste right. After some investigation I realized the specks were artificial—I bit into a cache of them, a blob which hadn’t mixed properly, which had almost no taste to it. After tasting Berthillon ice cream in Paris, I am now quite spoiled.

The Casati biography has arrived from Australia—it was the only copy on ABE; why it’s so scarce I have no idea, as it was only published in 2000. It looks like it will be a good read, and I look forward to it. Leftover *hachis parmentier* for dinner while making fun of the MTV Video Music Awards. *Pardieu!* how music has degenerated into pure noise.

§ **September 4.** While walking Lucie to MUNI, we began talking about the film *Yankee Doodle Dandy*; I recalled the musical number “Harrigan” and began to sing it, but for some reason I thought the name was Delancey. When I got to the chorus, “D-E-double-L-A (wait a minute), N-C-E-Y that’s *Delancey*,” I couldn’t make the words fit the tune. Lucie thought I was being silly, but it wasn’t until hours later that I realized the name was Harrigan, not Delancey. The ditty haunted me all afternoon, I couldn’t control it any more than I could the beat of my own heart.

There were two earthquakes this evening, but both times I was riding the N and didn’t feel them; Lucie felt the first, however, describing it as a

single, strong jolt.

§ **September 5.** At eight o'clock, our tranquil evening was disturbed by incredibly loud jungle music wafting over the city. I knew immediately it must be coming from the Phoenix Motel's evil Bambuddha Lounge, over a half-mile away! (It is the general rule that, the louder the music, the worse it is; and this was no exception.) What unbelievable gall, what effrontery to disturb the neighborhood with degenerate rhythms of such intensity and volume, no one in its sphere can escape. When Lucie telephoned to complain, the desk clerk had the audacity to sneer, "We have a *permit*." After lodging a complaint with the police department, Lucie and I settled onto the divan for an evening of "phat beats" (what choice had we?), but, to our great relief, they stopped some fifteen minutes later.

§ **September 6.** The governor has signed a bill allowing *illegal immigrants* to obtain California driver's licenses. Has the world gone *mad*? Or is it *me*? Until now I had opposed the recall election, but after this tomfoolery I believe I have changed my mind. How I loathe politics...

Lucie and I went to Whole Foods this evening to find it closed, dark, and surrounded by PG&E trucks. We reluctantly went to nearby Cala, where we made do with substandard produce and crowds; while waiting in line, I noticed a horrific smell, and turned around to behold an obese Negro woman smearing what I believed to be spoiled mayonnaise into her hair and singing a random melody; at her feet were over a dozen plastic shopping bags filled with odds 'n' ends—this was undoubtedly the Queen of Bag Ladies, if there be such a thing. Despite the decided lack of elbow room, grimacing customers were obliged to form a large arc around her. When I notified the cashier, he said, "Who, the lady behind you? She's alright, she comes in here all the time." For once, I was speechless; I paid for our merchandise and met Lucie outside, who had fled from the revolting scene. I opened my nostrils once again and took in large draughts of fresh air.

After dinner Lucie and I watched Bertrand Bonello's *Le Pornographe* (his second film, which he again wrote and directed), starring Jean-Pierre Léaud, whose years of chain-smoking (and fine dining, apparently) are clearly catching up with him. But he still demonstrates many, if not most (no more shortcuts over banisters), of those familiar graceful movements, now a flourish of the wrist, now a finger raised delicately to emphasize a point; he still has

a certain *je ne sais quoi* which sets him apart (yes, men can have it, too).

Léaud plays Jacques Laurent, aging director who decades ago stopped making pornographic films, which stood out within the genre for their emphasis on poetry over the sexual act (an excerpt from one of his early films shows a woman on a table, clad in a swimsuit and moving her limbs as if swimming; meanwhile, her lover “conducts” a lush Bach cantata while sniffing her *derrière*—how French!), but were made as a political statement; we now find him directing again because it’s all he knows how to do. However, times have changed; while filming a sex scene for a new film, in which Laurent has given the actress careful instructions for achieving the level of delicacy he desires, Laurent’s penny-pinching producer butts in, contradicting Laurent’s directions by telling the actress to moan louder, put it in her mouth (the uncut version features an eleven-second “money shot” which the prudish British alone deemed inappropriate for an “18” rating—and they’re the ones whose television programs feature more nudity and prurient content than those of any other country—go figure), then thoughtlessly cueing up some not-so-subtle music—a nod to the demise of subtlety, a metaphor for our blatant times.

There are clear parallels between the character Laurent and Léaud the actor (intentional, I wonder?)—in the interview scene, in which Laurent berates the interviewer for what he calls her “obscene” questions (obscene because he finds them too personal), one could believe it was an actual interview with Léaud, who is known to be reclusive, difficult, and very private; he once hit an elderly neighbor over the head with a flower pot because he suspected her of “spying” on him.

§ **September 8.** I have become accustomed to looking out the window each evening to see if the basement window of the building next door is closed; the hammering of its ailing boiler keep me awake at night. This time it was open, so I went downstairs to close it, a task which requires one to get the key to the patio from the doorman, climb a fence, wade through a thicket of weeds, shut the window, &c. (I’m falling asleep as I write this); ordinarily I do this unseen, but this evening there were people in the patio, “dog” people. A large black poodle began to jump on me, rubbing his rough, filthy paws down the front of my trousers; meanwhile, his owner did nothing to stop it. I made it clear by my body language and disgusted facial expression that I didn’t want the dog to jump on me, but the owner merely laughed and said, “She sees a new face! Ha ha ha!” At last I commanded, “Down!”; I kicked

a tennis ball, which distracted the animal only for a moment, to which the still oblivious owner remarked, “That’s a new one!” Only when I shoved the beast aside with a gentle but firm kick (Dear Reader, I would *never* hurt an animal—it’s the owner I wanted to kick), the owner at last began to realize that not everyone enjoys the appalling stink of man’s best friend, and left.

There remained yet another dog person, Mr. Savedow—the president of the dreaded homeowner’s association and resident of the penthouse; his twin Pomeranians were too busy snapping and growling at each other to care about me. I felt obliged to let him know what I was about to do; I pointed to the window, then the fence; I told him the whole dull story. When he lost interest and resumed reading his newspaper, I completed my task and returned upstairs, hot and annoyed.

**§ September 9.** Up at 10:30; I accompanied Lucie to Bell (part of the Cala chain) where we beheld in the deli section a “wild” woman (she resembled an Australian aborigine to my eyes), shoving blackened, mushy bananas into her mouth in quick succession while at the same time fussing about with wads of coupons. Nearby, a transgendered black prostitute with basketball-sized false breasts and buttock implants to match swaggered by in a hot pink micro-dress, her white pimp (an obvious heroin addict) in tow, with a shopping basket containing Pop Tarts and a six-pack of something called Red Bull.

I feel like I have nothing to say; all I am capable of talking about anymore are *things* rather than *ideas*—what I ate for breakfast, the contents of my closet, what’s on television. Perhaps I’m not as clever as I think. But Lucie and I often lie awake o’ nights, expressing to each other marvelous ideas, ideas which, the next morning, I am no longer able to articulate (Lucie has admitted the same dilemma). It is true my mind is at its most lucid in the twilight hours; while during the day I am often a zombie, barely able to function.

As I write this, a neighbor (alas, out of egg range) has placed speakers in his window, pointing outward (for whose benefit?), from which blast salsa music. I am sick of constantly being forced to listen to other people’s music wherever I go; when I am at home it’s neighbors, passing cars, and nearby night clubs; in stores it’s the same monotonous dance music—Macy’s is surrounded by dozens of outdoor speakers from which insipid tunes dribble at all hours. People’s headphones are always too loud, and there is the ubiquitous clatter of skateboards, wheeled suitcases, “boom boxes”, Snappers, and

so forth. I am perpetually complaining about noise, noise that sometimes I alone seem to be bothered by—gum smacking, shuffling feet, whistling, basketball dribbling, &c. At any given moment, I perceive an unpleasant sound. From whence did this sensitivity come, was I always this way? I do remember as a youth placing little wads of tissue in the grille of the electric fan to keep it from rattling (something I still do), and being annoyed by the roar of motorcycles. As I appear to grow more sensitive with age, I fear what the future brings. Perhaps I'll become deaf from it all.

§ **September 14.** There was some sort of chili “cook-off” jazz festival at the park today; unfortunately, it was also warm and we had to open the windows in the library. Since one couldn't escape the music, one could only try to ignore it, which I found impossible. Add to the confusion the sound of a nearby basketball game and wedding party. Despite the heat and riotous atmosphere, the library was fairly busy. I helped one schoolboy find a pile of books on robots; when his mother saw how many he had selected, she said, “You'll have to put some of those back, young man,” to which he replied, “But Mom, I'm building a robot!” What is everyone else reading? Our mostly all-white, bourgeois patrons are suddenly clamoring for *The Namesake*, *Sense of Evil*, or *Johnny Angel*. Meanwhile, there is a waiting list for something called *The Da Vinci Code*. And all those lovely slim volumes of decadent poetry gathering dust!

§ **September 15.** As Lucie and I traversed Union Square, whatever peace we expected at 6:30 a.m. was undermined by Caffé Rulli's outdoor speakers roaring Janet Jackson's “Black Cat” as those of Macy's across the street trumpeted Duran Duran's “Girls on Film”. A lone caffè patron was actually attempting to read the newspaper above this juvenile din. I feel like there is rarely a moment when I hear no music at all.

In the post, a mystery check from the IRS for \$1,398.89. Neither Lucie nor I can figure out what it's for, but it will make a small but welcome dent in my credit card balance.

§ **September 16.** Lucie and I spent the afternoon in various department stores looking for a winter coat for her. While at Nordstrom, I went to the men's department to look at their tweed suits; on my way I looked up and happened to see a series of abstract paintings upon the wall which duplicated

in almost every way an attempt I had made in the late '80s—a painterly canvas of rough, vertical strokes of red before a background of black and white. I regarded the work a dismal mess, and now I was confronted with manifold versions of it. My original was destroyed, but I have a photograph of it which I will post here if I can locate it.

Later, we were obliged to board an N packed with baseball fans, that bane of couth. The smell of body odour mingled with that of cheap beer; one could not hear oneself think due to the roar of common voices. Statistics from last night's game were shouted in one ear, while other random trivia was shouted into the other. A young Jew braced himself between two cap-wearing rednecks, his faced buried in Leon Uris' *Exodus*. At Powell, one of the rednecks espied the paperback; I overheard him say to his companion, "Exodus...I don't know what that means." As Lucie and I shoved our way out the door, the other redneck forthwith began singing Bob Marley's dorm room standard, "Exodus". The tune brought back to me a torrent of unpleasant college memories...

§ **September 19.** Avast! Today, I am told, is "Talk Like a Pirate Day". In the spirit of this worthy occasion, I had planned to feed the rest of today's journal entry through the web-based Pirate Translator, but the results fell somewhat short of expectations.

Luncheon with Chimes at Pasand; as I heaped my plate with saffron rice, curries, samosas, naan, raita, and so forth, I could barely contain my excitement; despite a sore jaw which I somehow injured in my sleep last night, I ate ravenously, as if starved.

Felix was ill, so Carmella cancelled tonight's dinner; this meant we could show up to Kenneth's party earlier and still have time to see Woody Allen's new film. Kenneth's new loft is in SOMA, so to avoid walking through the Tenderloin Lucie and I walked down O'Farrell to Van Ness, then to 11th, then down Howard, three sides of a square, eighteen blocks instead of six. Despite the detour we were still early; we killed fifteen minutes in Stormy Leather, rolling our eyes at all the preposterous sex gadgets. I'm no prude, but it's really hard to believe some people enjoy handcuffs, whips, masks, and so forth, although we did see a couple of lovely silk corsets.

Lucie and I were surprised but pleased to have been invited to Kenneth's party—we had assumed he and Alfred had forgotten us. Lucie and I sampled the bits of steak, samosas, and cheese, then attempted to mingle. Chroni-

cally anti-social, mingling is not an easy task for Lucie and me, as we are oft disposed to stand in a corner and stare at our feet. Alfred showed us his and Kenneth's collection Jerome Caja paintings, chiefly macabre scenes of masturbating clowns, popes, and transvestites. I made the mistake of commenting on a chap's Nina Hagen t-shirt; presently I was trapped in a conversation about pop music with him and a suddenly gathering crowd. "Oh, I saw them back in '85 when they opened for Depeche Mode," eliciting chuckles and nodding heads all 'round, or, "I saw [insert band name here] before they signed to [insert label name here]," which was met with cries of "Impressive!" The DJ hadn't arrived yet, but Kenneth had put on a Plastic Bertrand album, which had a pleasant chubby fellow with pink hair and torn, plaid clothing energetically pogoing about the room, singing along phonetically with the choruses. It occurred to me that I missed the cheerful music of the '80s, which focused on having a good time; today's popular music is aggressive, hateful, obnoxious, and whiny, symptomatic of today's generation of aggressive, hateful, obnoxious, whiny people.

Lucie and I left reluctantly at 8:00, walking up Howard to the Metreon to see the new Woody Allen film. The cast of shady characters we met along the way had us kicking ourselves for not having taken a cab. The Metreon was swarming with enthusiastic Goths, clutching tickets for a vampire film called *Underworld*. At the ticket counter an Oriental gentleman called out, "Next!" but when we approached he mumbled, "We're closed." After some confusion it was determined he had said, "Welcome to Loews," but to me it had sounded like, "We're closed." Soon, we were in our seats; the theater was filled with an audience which looked very much like what Woody Allen fans are supposed to look like—white, middle-aged, glasses, balding, but when the previews started, a gentleman who resembled rapper "50 Cents" arrived with a giggling, scantily clad Hispanic girl on each arm; of course they sat directly in front of Lucie and me. The girls each produced cell phones then appeared to call each other, giggling at everything each other said. I wondered why people like this would want to see a Woody Allen film, but after thirty minutes without an explosion or car chase, they walked out.

Lucie and I usually don't go to the movies, we only go when it's a film by a favorite director, or if it's a French film (we'll see anything if it's French). I prefer the Lumière or any of the single-screen independent theaters still standing, many of which are from the art deco era; if we're unlucky, as we were tonight, it's at the AMC 1000 Van Ness or the mall-like Metreon, vast megaplexes in which all the inane Hollywood blockbusters appear, attracting

the lowest common denominator of society. Admittedly, Allen's not exactly an underground filmmaker, but his last few of films opened at the agreeable Clay or the Embarcadero; Lucie and I saw *Sweet and Lowdown* at the Lynchian Balboa out near the ocean.

After the film Lucie and I walked home, which on a Friday night is usually an unpleasant task; rather than a pleasant, romantic stroll through Union Square, Lucie and I were beset by various squalid individuals all seeking our money. One such person leapt from the shadows with a stack of "Street Sheet" newspapers and cried, in a most patronizing manner, "Welcome to San Francisco! How are *you* folks this evening?"—and this was on deserted Sutter Street, which we had purposefully taken to avoid such encounters! Lucie and I were nearly hit by a car as we dashed across the street to escape.

§ **September 21.** Lucie accompanied me to the library today, where we beforehand enjoyed a pleasant picnic luncheon in the park. We read poetry all day, although I was interrupted several times to answer a reference question, one of which was a British woman who wanted to know how to spell "panty". I was also approached by a pack of high school students with a video camera who wanted to ask me a "few questions" for a school project. They looked to me like future fraternity and sorority material, who had been out drinking but reluctantly stopped by the library so they wouldn't fail their assignment. A young woman asked me a few token questions such as, "Do you like working at the library?" and "How did you become a librarian?"; meanwhile, her classmates stood idle with their hands in their pockets, glancing now at their shoes, now at the clock. The young man with the camera seemed the most apathetic, turning off the camera in the middle of one of my soliloquies. "Let's go," he hissed impatiently to the girl, who looked annoyed. "Wait a minute," she said, walking over to the encyclopaedias, picking one up and staring at it blankly, as if she had never seen one before. At last she set it down and said, "Alright, now we can go." At these words everyone by their countenance expressed relief, and as they quit the room, at once became ebullient.

§ **September 23.** Macy's is evil! Usually, they blast dance music from dozens of outdoor speakers. This morning, they were blasting a perfume commercial (the same one, repeatedly) at a volume so high as to cause distortion. What knavery! One may be compelled to attempt to destroy the speakers, but there are too many of them, and they are mounted out of reach.



Lucie and I placed out hands over our ears, but other pedestrians seemed not to mind; in fact, many people were entering the store, no doubt in a rush to buy whatever common scent was being advertised.

§ **September 24.** In the break room today I encountered two of our tech support people engaged in a conversation about their phone bills—they sounded like a television commercial.

It is often a peaceful journey home across the bay; I am able to read undisturbed, the only passenger on a bus which seats fifty. However, several Lesbians have of late been boarding in Emeryville; they are as boisterous as they are homely. They sit all about me, rows apart, shouting to each other in voices worthy of lumberjacks as I struggle to concentrate on my book. Today, there were only two of them; after a short but deafening conversation about Bonnie Raitt, they suddenly stopped talking and produced paperback novels. One bruiser, whom I have nicknamed the Brawny Man, was reading Patricia Cornwell's *Hornet's Nest*, while her companion, whom I will call the Paper Boy, perused *The Fire Engine That Disappeared*.

It pains me to say unkind words, but I can't help it. While part of me wishes to do good deeds, think wholesome thoughts, and love my neighbor, there is another part which is constantly irritated by my fellow man, for whom I feel nothing but contempt, repugnance, and animosity. Everyone is a bore, an idiot, or a pest. From whence does my misanthropy come? There is obviously something wrong with me. Quality Control missed me as I sped by on the conveyor belt on that warm June evening, thirty-five years ago. Are there others like me? Is my serial number among a range of those recalled due to a known defect? Perhaps there is a pill for people like me? But I wouldn't take it, I wouldn't, I wouldn't, I wouldn't!

§ **September 25.** No Lesbians this morning; the bus driver provided my only distraction, talking to himself in a booming baritone worthy of Rigoletto or Iago. What was he saying? It sounded as if he were reading the ingredients on the back of a box of cereal. I closed my book in resignation and looked out the window with a deep sigh.

At the office, I made the mistake of joining in a conversation with the people in Marketing about Wyoming; when I recalled an unpleasant stay in a "hideous" town, Sandy said, "Don't refer to cities as hideous—it's *most* unfair

and very rude!” I could only roll my eyes and retreat from the room as the conversation continued without me.

§ **September 26.** Poor Lucie—when her train arrived, there spilled forth from it an unimaginable mass of uncouth baseball fans; one would never believe so many people could fit on one train. After an interminable wait, I spotted Lucie among the crowd, jostled, miserable, her every nerve frayed. It was some minutes before she was herself again; I daresay I fear for her health and sanity should she suffer another such journey. If only the stupid Giants or whatever they’re called would lose their games and thus end their bid for the championship.

§ **September 27.** What joy! The fog has returned at last; my spirits have been lifted considerably. I loathe the sun; I am obliged to wear outdoors sunglasses and a broad-brimmed hat. It galls me when the fog retreats and the weatherman says, “Sunny and warm for San Francisco, a *beautiful* day, yuck yuck!” What kind of person loves a sunny day? Give me instead a gray, melancholy day, the kind of day conducive to curling up with a book.

On the way to Whole Foods, Lucie and I found a \$20 on the sidewalk, certainly dropped by a drug dealer. I dislike witnessing drug deals; always accomplished out in the open, brazenly and in the full light of day, I avert my eyes and whistle a tune as I pass by. I should hate to be stabbed, or worse.

Whole Foods was crowded beyond belief; the pushing and shoving one must endure is really nearly too much. If I didn’t have such an aversion to confrontation, each of my days should be filled with one confrontation after another. Rather, I strive for flight and concealment. At the cashier, an Oriental woman forced her way in front of me before I had even been given my receipt; when I removed to the end of the counter to collect our groceries, she followed, her hip pressed against mine, her elbow in my ribs. As our faces were nearly touching, I felt obliged to speak; I turned and said, “How do you do?” but was completely ignored. I really didn’t wish to speak to her anyway; I only did so to dispel the intolerable awkwardness of the situation.

What have we been watching? The six-disc DVD of Masterpiece Theater’s production of *The Forsyte Saga*. Lucie and I have become addicted to Masterpiece Theater, watching as much of it as we can. The trouble is, when one rents a seven-hour series, one is obliged to watch it over one or two days

or pay late fees; I'd rather watch at a more leisurely rate, as it is tiresome to sit in front of the television for extended periods of time.

§ **September 28.** A picnic luncheon in the park with Lucie. One of life's simple pleasures is watching one's wife slide down a tube backwards whilst shrieking with glee. Lucie and I both tried the swing set but were immediately sickened—it's funny how what one used to enjoy as a child becomes nauseating as an adult.

Wesley, bless his heart, with his wandering eye, speech impediment, and chronic halitosis, is such a sweet man but is also rather a slob, in his plastic Fila sandals, lifeless sweatpants, and stretched-out t-shirt with big sweat stains in the armpits. Persecuted for his appearance at the M— Public Library, he retired and now works weekends in S—. He likes to talk about how his former supervisor criticized him for putting his cell phone in his t-shirt pocket (because it looks sloppy), but seems honestly unaware of how inappropriate his attire is for work. I merely nod in agreement, unwilling to hurt his feelings because he has assuredly suffered so much his whole life. To hear him tell it, he's an accomplished pianist and organist; we often spend long afternoons talking about music. He already knew about Nyiregyházi and even owns one of his records.

§ **September 29.** I awoke with a headache, a pain in my neck, and blurred vision in my right eye. This has happened before; it usually goes away in a couple of days. I suspect a pinched nerve. I hope it's not a brain tumor! But if I were to make a doctor's appointment, I would feel better before I could see him and he would only shrug at my vague symptoms.

Lucie and I both stayed home, sleeping until ten o'clock. Fruit and toast for breakfast while watching *That Forsythe Woman*, a grossly truncated and inferior version of Galsworthy's saga. Later, we watched *Wild Man Blues*, a cheerless documentary about Woody Allen's jazz band in which he comes across as an awkward, moody, troubled man. Soon-Yi is insufferable; I will never understand what he sees in her, as she seems a most unpleasant companion. I adore Mr. Allen's films (well, many of them—especially his mid-career dramas), but his clarinet playing is mediocre; his band mates must realize this but they don't say anything because they all want to be in a band with Woody Allen. Actually, none of his band mates are very inspired; they're trying to keep alive a music which doesn't really exist anymore. Give

me the original recordings any day over a stale, museum-like live performance.

§ **October 1.** Randolphe is using Diane's old office for a "teleconference" (*pardieu*, how I cringe at this modern jargon!). He has asked me to turn down my Victrola while his meeting is in progress. Meanwhile, I can hear his voice booming through the wafer-thin wall which separates us. Unfair!

I accompanied my colleagues to the Pyramid Ale House for luncheon, at noon, of course, when every other Tom, Dick, and Harry take their luncheon. I don't know why I did it; after all, it's only a free meal—I'm not starving! The topics of conversation never strayed from work, "The Simpsons," *The Matrix*, computers, computer games, and sports. I angered the whole table when I defended Rush Limbaugh's so-called racist remark about athlete Donovan McNabb—that's what I get when I try to kick with the fray!

After returning to the office at two o'clock, I drove to Mountain View to pick up Lucie; it's her company's last day at its present location—the movers won't touch 'personal effects', so we had to put Lucie's paintings, sculptures, and other *objets d'art* in the trunk of the car until Monday. After entering the building (I still remember the electronic door code), I encountered in the lobby the wretched Gretchen and was forced to exchange banalities with her, something I cannot bear to do even for one instant, as she is such a revolting person in every way. On our way out, Lucie and I saw Gretchen again, loitering in the parking lot, which prompted Lucie to drag me behind a hedge until Gretchen at last talked her way into a ride home with Duke.

Spurning the internecine interstate highways, Lucie and I prefer to take El Camino Real, the 'old road' home, which still shows vestiges of art deco motor courts, neon signs, and burger joints diffused among the Saturn dealerships, Blockbuster Videos, and Quiznos (where the blazes did all these Quiznos come from all of a sudden?). We always look for a place to dine but nothing appeals to us; until at last we're in Daly City and it's too late. However, this night Lucie suggested Bertolucci's, an old Italian joint from the 'Sixties. It took an effort to find it, lost within a ghetto, but after some wrong turns we at length beheld its magnificent neon sign, broadcasting its red shadow over the neighborhood.

Moments later we were seated in a studded leather semi-circular booth under cottage cheese ceilings, brass and glass chandeliers, and framed photographs of famous diners—Jim Neighbors, Jack Lord, Colonel Sanders. Lucie and I contemplated the décor (described as "elegant Florentine" in the history

on the back of the menus), unaltered since the restaurant opened in 1962—clear plastic beaded curtains, Corinthian columns, and a multi-tiered fountain; much of the blue-haired clientele seemed leftover from the olden days, as well—old '49ers fans, widowers, and bar flies. Mr. Bertolucci, who had the air of a retired baseball coach, handed us our menus, then pattered about the place, straightening things, picking up crumbs, and shooting the breeze with familiar faces. Our waiter, an elderly gentleman from Portsmouth, was a character right out of Dickens; when we ordered two glasses of pinot noir, he replied, “Never hoid of it. We got yer cabernet *and* we got yer merlot.”

As we walked home after having parked the car, we bumped into Dick Winchell, who appeared sweaty, nervous, and hunted. We stopped but I could tell he didn't want to. “I'm on my way to the gym,” he panted. “Oh, Julian, I met somebody who knows you the other day...where did he say he worked? Do you know anybody at Alibris? He said he worked at Alibris.”

I have no idea who it could be. I don't like the idea of people discussing me in my absence; its existential implications are too disturbing. We parted ways, none of us, to my relief, suggesting we “get together soon or something.”

§ **October 2.** I have an interview in a few minutes for a part-time job I don't care if I get or not, thus I feel confident and not at all nervous. I'm on the fifth floor of the library, staring out the window where the fog is howling through the barbed wire placed on the railing to discourage pigeons; the view suggests a scene from a Siberian prison camp. In the otherwise quiet reading area, I hear the tinny *tic tic tic* of a student's headphones—how can he possibly read at the same time?

§ **October 5.** After a sleepless night during which I lay on the floor to keep from disturbing Lucie with my constant tossing and turning, a pig on a spit, I dragged myself to the library. Wesley was there today, looking the worst I have ever seen him—a hopeless slob in his stretched out, bleached-stained t-shirt, deflated sweat pants, and offensive sandals, but despite this, Wesley's one of the most decent fellows in the world.

I was parched, but too unwell to walk down the street to the grocer's, so I purchased a bottle of Dasani-brand bottled water from the vending machine downstairs. The liquid within, Coca Cola's idea of “drinking water,” tasted of metal and plastic, and conjured up images in my mind of “heavy water” from a nuclear reactor.

Meanwhile, the vision in my right eye is blurred again, the second time in a week. I thumbed through several medical books—do I have optic neuritis? Multiple sclerosis? Diabetes?

§ **October 6.** I left early to pick up Lucie from Mountain View, but got stuck in baseball traffic on the 880. Curse you, A's! Curse you, baseball fans! When will baseball season ever end?

Lucie and I took El Camino home, this time stopping for dinner at <http://www.mcpies.com/> Marie Callender's. If we're moving to the Midwest, I imagine we'll have to get used to eating at places such as this. We started with chicken planks and quesadillas; Lucie had the French Dip, while I ordered the meatloaf with mashed potatoes, corn bread, and a salad smothered with "1000 Island" dressing.

The food was really rather good, but as I chewed each bite, I couldn't help but wonder at its uniform consistency, its unsettling homogeneity, and chewy "heaviness." It gave one the feeling that the food had been engineered in a laboratory for "maximum dining pleasure." Of course, the rest of the evening Lucie and I felt like two bloated, beached whales, a sensation not altogether pleasurable.

§ **October 7.** I had an appointment with Dr. Lin, an ophthalmologist at UCSF. After a thorough examination, he said he could find nothing wrong at all; I have to return Thursday for a fasting glucose test which will determine if I have diabetes, otherwise Dr. Lin suggested I may be having optical migraines.

After quitting Dr. Lin's office, I had an hour to kill before I had to meet Lucie; because my eyes were still completely dilated, I couldn't read the Anaïs Nin I had brought along, so I just sat on the steps of the Union and watched people, one of my favorite pastimes. I must have looked ridiculous wearing dark sunglasses on such a foggy afternoon. I would have waited inside the Union, but they had the overhead heaters on, which made it unbearably hot.

§ **October 8.** While walking past the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts this morning at 7:00 a.m., I saw an overturned delivery truck on their front steps. I knew it was intended to be modern art, but I nevertheless found the scene unsettling; I saw it as a dark portent of a future San Francisco under martial law.

Bette's Oceanview Diner for lunch (there is no ocean view); despite arriving at 11:00 to avoid the lunch crowd, I still had to sit at the bar. I had a tuna melt with potato salad and iced tea, which I ate in about two minutes. I fished around for my book, but just then the jukebox roared to life, it was The Singing Nun, singing "Dominique," something I hadn't expected to hear. Bette's does a decent job of pretending to be a "vintage" diner, but everything's a bit too perfect for my taste; I prefer those now rare establishments which have been in the same place, unchanged, for decades. Even the lowly Pinecrest seems to me more "authentic" somehow.

I couldn't concentrate with such a catchy song playing, so I walked down the street to Restoration Hardware, admiring all the merchandise I couldn't afford—a leather club chair, a glass bookcase, retro bathroom faucets with "froid" and "chaud" on the handles.

In anticipation of the Christmas season, which seems to have already begun, the store was rather crammed with merchandise as well as shoppers; at one point I was cornered by a very large "purple" woman with a pram. What I mean is, she was dressed completely in purple—purple hat, purple blouse, purple scarf, purple skirt, &c. With the exception of the Purple Man, and the terrifying Yellow Man of my childhood, these monochromatic individuals one sometimes sees are always purple (i.e. there is never a Green Lady), always women (often Lesbians), and always fat. The Purple Lady was engaged with a salesperson, so I was obliged to climb over the leather club chair to extricate myself from the corner.

§ **October 9.** Back to UCSF, this time for my fasting glucose test. Needles make me feel faint, and it didn't help matters that the Blue Angels were roaring through the sky. I tried to focus on patterns on the ceiling while the nurse prodded the soft, spongy area opposite my elbow. She thankfully stuck the back of my hand instead, an area which for some reason I don't find as sensitive.

I subsequently headed across town to the Human Resources department. By the time I got there, the fog had receded and I was rather warm, and so removed my coat. Upon entering the building, the Jamaican security guard exclaimed, "I love your tie, man!" He and his colleague then laughed uproariously. I wear my tie short, in a thick "Balthus" knot; their ties both hung down past their groins, which is apparently the current fashion.

After filling out a pile of papers and bidding good afternoon to the

security guards, who again complemented my tie and laughed at me, I walked up the hill to catch the 2 bus. Across the street, in the gale force wind, a man and a woman attempted in vain to attach Hallowe'en cobwebs to their hedges, which simply blew away.

§ **October 10.** This morning the phone rang at 6:01; I leapt from bed and answered it, expecting catastrophic news, perhaps. "Hello, am I speaking to Julian?" I gulped; the voice sounded like my brother's. "I'm calling on behalf of the American Handicapped [something or other]..."

I didn't yet know it was 6:01; it was still dark. "Surely you jest—it's the middle of the night! Go home, Sir, and go to bed!" I slammed down the receiver. As I lay under the covers, fuming, I thought of all the clever things I should have said, had I thought of them.

Lucie has applied for a job in the Midwest. At last we both agree that it's time to leave the Bay Area for good. We've reached the top of the ladder here, so to speak, the higher rungs well out of our price range forever. We're ready for a change, for a simpler, less stressful way of life. The plan is this—for Lucie to find a suitable position in a small Midwestern university town. I'll keep my current situation and telecommute from home. We'll live near the university; I can walk Lucie to work mornings, meet her for luncheon, and escort her home. No more 51/2-hour commutes, no more moonlighting. We'll have our evenings and weekends free to putter around in the garden or sit on the porch together, sipping iced tea. Rather than a small room in the lowest ghetto, as we have now, we'll reside in a charming '20s-era bungalow on a tree-lined street, with a fireplace, hardwood floors, built-in bookshelves and so forth. How *bourgeois* of us, isn't it? Our fingers are crossed...

§ **October 11.** After a breakfast at the Pinecrest, I accompanied Lucie to Britex for some ribbon for her boots. Despite being fussy about matters sartorial, I rarely spend a dime on myself, but this day I went to Orvis and purchased a brown herringbone Harris tweed jacket, a couple of twill and flannel shirts, and a moleskin ranch jacket. Unfortunately, I won't be able to wear any of it until this nuisance of a heat wave ends.

The Blue Angels are still terrorizing my nerves; whenever they roar overhead, the people around me look to the skies with a awestruck smile while I stand there scowling, hands over my ears. I overheard a redneck explain to two women with "What it Takes" name tags, "You know when



they're headed right at you, you can't hear 'em until they're behind you." I wanted to punch him.

§ **October 12.** Lucie and I finally got to see F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*. The modern soundtracks to restored silent films are never to my taste, they never seem to get it right; we turned down the sound and found an acceptable replacement in Biber's *Mystery Sonatas*, then E. Power Biggs playing Bach after Count Orlok reached the shores of Germany on the doomed *Demeter*. Our enjoyment was short-lived, for the cable went out before the end of the film.

§ **October 13.** I was in a foul mood all day, unable to take pleasure in anything; everything and everyone rubbed me against the grain—the fake blind man's antics, the asshole at the ticket booth, the elderly Asian woman who tried to wedge herself between Lucie and me as we sat waiting for the N, the ubiquitous thump of dance music, often no more than an unaccompanied electronic drum. On the elevator at UCSF, people lean against the hip-level buttons (accessible by those in a wheelchair), so the elevator stops at every floor. I feel like at every moment I am either in someone's way or someone is in my way.

Tonight the electricity went out for a moment while I was using the computer; after I re-booted, opened my document, and resumed work, it went out again. Later, the water was shut off for some reason; when I fed the cats, I forgot and tossed out their water, which I had to replace with San Pellegrino. I hope it doesn't upset them.

§ **October 16.** On the bus to Kenneth's, an animated drunk boarded and began ranting, although good-humouredly. As Lucie and I disembarked at 8th St., I overheard him say to a young woman, "Say, you don't look so good. Are you just tired or did something happen to you?"

"I'm just tired," was the young woman's feeble answer.

"I'd take you out anyway. Do you like Coca-Cola...or 'Don Perion'?" he asked, as the young woman disembarked.

At Kenneth's, Lucie and I commenced the gloomy work of organizing Paul's books and papers. His sister had taken his journals after his death, which would have been the most important aspect of his archives; what

remained in a dozen boxes were manuscripts of unfinished novels, rejection letters from publishers, letters to and from Edmund White, May Sarton and Robert Ferro, contracts, royalty statements (a dollar here, a dollar there), newspaper clippings, lists scribbled on scraps, his will and death certificate, receipts, and countless medical bills. As Lucie sorted through it all, I began to assess his library which consists largely of classic and contemporary fiction, gay smut, and books on magic. I spotted Rick Whitaker's book which made me think of Louis, whom I've neglected lately in my correspondence—in his recent journal entries, he complains of “something extra” in his abdomen.

§ **October 17.** This morning as I walked across the lobby I saw Mr. Ffolliot sitting in the big leather chair, staring into space. I was just about to quit the building, thought better of it, then turned around and approached Mr. Ffolliot to offer my condolences on the loss of his friend, Bill. I had to hear the same old stories about Bill's career in Vaudeville, his and Mr. Ffolliot's collection of Asian art, and that one Barbara Stanwyck story. As he spoke I mentally patted myself on the back for listening to the long-winded but kindly old man. When I felt I had heard enough, I found an opportunity to interrupt him and excuse myself, inadvertently calling him “Bill,” but I don't think he noticed.

Upon my arrival at the office I looked out my window where I saw not my little squirrel friend, but a soiled pair of briefs dangling from the lowest branches. The sight of those nasty undies not three feet away made me flush with adrenaline; I flew down the stairs, grabbed the Swiffer, and swiffed the offending garment from the boughs and onto a lawn across the street. When I returned to my desk, I could still see it, all lit up in the morning sun, mocking me.

§ **October 18.** I forgot to set the alarm; Lucie and I hastily dressed, immediately found a taxi, and within minutes were back at Kenneth's, bleary-eyed but ready for a day of dust inhalation, paper cuts, and aching backs. I dealt with various book dealers throughout the day, who together carted away the contents of a single bookcase, total, to the tune of \$350. Paul's papers are so far unremarkable; he had wished it all to be given to the Gay and Lesbian Center, but I question their interest in them, especially without his journals, which were swiped by his sister upon his death.

Lucie has turned off the colour on our television, so everything is now

in black & white, which lends a sort of innocence to modern programs. We watched again our video of Nancy Mitford's *Love in a Cold Climate* before turning in at midnight, exhausted. I realise I am quite an anglophile, but for the England of Nancy Mitford, P. G. Wodehouse, and Jane Austen—a romantic, tweedy England of which I fear nothing remains. Perhaps we shall visit some day; I certainly hope so.

§ **October 19.** As Lucie and I were driving home on the Golden Gate Bridge, we saw a great cruise ship departing; taking the next exit, we drove down to Fort Point to watch it chug by. The area behind the fort is now off-limits, guarded by several machine gun-wielding men in camouflage, who curiously did not bat an eyelash as a young man in a wet suit climbed around the fence, a type of small surf board in hand; he slid into the bay and was immediately pitched into the rocks in a rough manner. Fortunately, one still has a rather marvelous view of the water, traversed at that moment not by one cruise ship but another, just entering the Golden Gate, led by a tiny “pilot boat.” Presently, a helicopter appeared, flying underneath the bridge in a manoeuvre which I regarded as foolhardy. After the show was over, we got back into the car and parked further down the beach where the waves were crashing against the rocks in a spectacular fashion. Every few minutes, a wave would splash against our car to our great delight. The last two times I bought petrol the car wash was out of service; at last, a “car wash” of sorts, albeit a salty one.

§ **October 20.** I call him ‘The Hoser’; when I hear his hose at 5:15 a.m. I can’t fall back asleep because of the hosing, but also because I know the alarm will go off soon. So I lie there listening to the hosing, seething with anger. I know I shouldn’t bother with such trivial matters, but I can’t help it, my body betrays me with adrenaline and cortisol, which surge throughout my bloodstream regardless of my will to relax. Any unpleasantness can trigger the response—a coarse voice, a foul odour, the proximity of other people.

Lucie and I have a Monday morning routine. At 5:45 I dress, then walk ten blocks in the dark to retrieve the car; I pick up Lucie, then drive her to the train depot. I am the first to arrive at the office; this morning it was cold and silent—the power was out. After my colleagues began to arrive, one of them found out the power would be out until at least noon, so I grabbed my things and fled. I took BART back to the city; once back home I cleaned house,

read, wrote, played with the cats, and performed various chores neglected of late since Lucie and I took extra work organizing Paul's papers.

After a luncheon of chicken salad, I went to Whole Foods, then set off to find an art supply store I had seen on Van Ness. However, either it's not there any more or it was the other direction; I walked almost to the Marina before giving up. I had forgotten my sunglasses; doing without them was torturous, as the sun was high in the sky and quite bright. I returned on Polk St., the far end of which has changed considerably since I had last seen it. Several businesses have closed, among the new ones is a dildo shop called Good Vibrations; I shuddered to see displayed in its window a black latex glove upon a mannequin's hand. I'm no prude, but I found the image quite disturbing and fought the rest of the afternoon to expunge it from my mind.

§ **October 21.** The \$20 bill just got uglier. In the newspaper, they are saying counterfeiters have already made a reasonable facsimile of them—oh, well! Why does everything become worse—uglier, cheaper, flimsier, tackier, and not better? I cannot think of one thing which has become better over time.

After accompanying Lucie to the doctor's office, we had luncheon at Miz Brown's Feed Bag, where we debated the origins of the vague abbreviation "Ms." and discussed how to address letters to women of unknown age or marital status. Like the "Madame" of the French, I prefer to use "Mrs." which once upon a time sufficed—young or unmarried recipients understood one could not have known to use "Miss"; in today's politically correct America one is offended at every turn—it is now necessary to write, "Dear Jane Doe."

§ **October 24.** I was without car in Berkeley thus had to run various errands on foot—a new notebook, matting for our Lou Stoumen print, and a cat toy. It was another bloody warm day, without shade or breeze. I almost stopped for luncheon at the new Anatolian restaurant, but as they have no air conditioning I instead continued to Spenger's Fresh Fish Grotto—air conditioned, but harshly lit by newfangled bulbs which made my eyes smart. Too cross to explore the abundant menu, I ordered the fish 'n' chips; the fish was delicious and so was my lemonade, but the fries were overcooked and cold.

§ **October 27.** After accompanying Lucie to the train depot, I walked to the title company at 135 Main St. to drop off photocopies of our driver's licenses; their offices weren't open for another hour, so I read Anaïs Nin in a horrid little courtyard. My concentration was disturbed by a chorus of loud beeping sounds which beeped out of sync. After the beeping was soon joined by a buzzer, I slammed my book shut and waited sullenly, regarding the pompous architecture surrounding me. Every few moments, a person appeared and rummaged through the trash cans on either side of me; how wretched it must be to live in such a manner. With so many people looking in the same trash cans, it is a wonder anyone finds anything.

§ **October 28.** The overturned delivery truck outside the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts is still there, but now there is next to it a large yellow sign which says, "This is art. Do not call 911." I imagine with a chuckle all the concerned citizens who did call 911, oblivious to the truck's other possibilities...

§ **October 29.** On the way down Post this morning, I found abandoned before the Disney Store a pile of life-sized cardboard displays of children in various costumes; I took one of a little boy below whom was written, "I want to be Buzz!" and placed it in Chimes' office. Later, he stuck his head in my office and said, "You sick bastard." For the rest of the day, I jokingly called him "Buzz" but I will stop because the name doesn't suit him.

On the bus to Berkeley, of course some of the more sociable passengers asked me what I was carrying; the jolly fat black lady said "Buzz" is a character from *The Toy Story*. Remembering to be more agreeable, I replied, "I *prefer* the early Disney films" instead of using the phrase, "I hate..." In an effort to be more sociable, I joined in the morning banter among Bruno, the jolly fat black lady, and the bus driver. When I told Bruno that Lucie and I were to see *Don Carlos* next month, he said, "That's a long one. I've seen it a dozen times, once in Turkey...in *Turkish*" then proceeded to sing an aria from it in Turkish. After dining with him earlier this year, Lucie and I no longer attempt to make plans with Bruno. Lucie says she thinks he wants to sleep with me.

The lovely barbotine umbrella stand Lucie ordered from Rue de France arrived today in pieces, obviously packed by a moron. Lucie called their Customer Service department, who told her they would send a replacement

at once.

*Hallowe'en.* I've become obsessed with finding a job in the Midwest. Each day I visit a dozen library-related job sites, fingers crossed for that perfect vacancy announcement, but there really has been nothing these last two weeks. Meanwhile, those positions I have applied for are largely still open, with closing dates well into December, so I must have patience.

I was reluctant, but Lucie convinced me that we should attend our building's Hallowe'en party. The weather has turned cold, with rain showers, wind, and hail, so the party was given in the community room instead of the patio. After making me retrieve every suitcase we own from storage, Lucie made herself up as the Marchesa Casati, complete with heavily kohled eyes, immense false lashes, a monkey stole, and a rubber snake about her neck. With her cadaverous visage, most guests assumed incorrectly she was a sorceress. Wearing the suit I had bought in Paris, a "bald cap" and a "Hello, my name is..." name tag on which I had written "D'Annunzio" in a florid calligraphic script, I was unconvincing as the decadent poet and anarchist; of course, I spent much of the evening explaining who D'Annunzio was.

Mr. Ffolliot, dressed in an elaborate toreador costume, played bartender; after he served us champagne in plastic cups Lucie and I attempted to mingle. Seated along the edges of the room were various elderly Filipino and Vietnamese residents, none in costume; standing in a cluster next to the buffet table were most of the board members, chiefly homosexual men in pink dresses. Derrick cornered me to discuss the urinal in the lobby restroom; he said some residents want it removed but he thinks it's part of the original art deco décor. As he described the restoration process, I nibbled on various foodstuffs, all vile—roast beef dripping with garlic, meatballs in soy sauce, and a cucumber and potato salad.

Much of the evening I talked to Mr. Ffolliot, who, stimulated by the festive atmosphere, was simply effervescent, bubbling over with lively conversation about the good ol' days; he found in me a sympathetic ear, one who harbors a keen appreciation of the past. When he saw Lucie, he told her the jewelry he had bought from her at the patio sale last year now adorned a large ceramic poodle in his apartment.

James from the ninth floor arrived, dressed in the manner of a mummy, albeit an unraveling one wearing jeans and a polo shirt underneath his bandages. Lucie and I sat with him in the corner and talked about writing and literature until everyone had left except the cleaning committee. James is also a writer; we all agreed to meet again on Monday to share with each

other our writing.

§ **November 1.** Lucie and I spent the day at Kenneth's, Lucie scanning photographs of Paul for his web site and I organizing his papers. Kenneth had left to run errands; as soon as he departed with the dogs we turned off his dance music and put on some CD's we had brought for the occasion. Presently, Kenneth's Lesbian buddy Fava entered, using her own key. Her presence dampened our spirits, for we had looked forward to an afternoon alone; instead, poor Lucie was obliged to make small talk as they sat at adjacent computers.

Then Kenneth returned, he busied himself in our midst with various tasks, tidying up his desk, dusting, and chatting playfully with Fava. "Fava, catch," he said, tossing her a digital camera. "We have too many." Later, he produced a Winnie the Pooh watch and offered it to Lucie. "Lucie, do you like Winnie the Pooh?"

"No, not really."

"You don't like Winnie the Pooh!" he and Fava exclaimed, in unison. "I thought *everybody* liked Winnie the Pooh."

§ **November 5.** On the way home from the office, I stopped by a used record store, an establishment I dislike but I sometimes find something worthwhile in their meagre classical music bins; on this day I found a disc of Liszt's organ works. After paying, one must present one's bag to the guard, who looks in the bag and compares its contents to the receipt. After he did so, he then asked me to open my satchel, which I did with an impatient sigh. Inside were several compact discs which I had taken to work; when he saw them he said to me in a pained and condescending voice, "Next time you *tell* me about these, so we don't have no misunderstandings, you hear me?" "Yes, yes," I mumbled as I walked briskly out the door, annoyed and slightly humiliated. Outside, a man in a pink leotard waved a pink package of condoms in my face, which I pushed away with a scowl.

§ **November 8.** At last, one of those days for which one longs all year, a rainy day off, on which one may lie on the divan, lost in a slim volume of decadent verse, as the curtains flap in the breeze, the skies turn black, and thunder rolls across the bay. One would hope the cloudburst would drive the children indoors from the playground; alas, we would not

be so lucky; they continued their games, oblivious to their soaked clothes, shrieking and laughing, bouncing basketballs, banging on things with pieces of wood, shouting, fighting, crying, blowing whistles, tossing Snappers at each other, and continuing to do whatever it takes to ensure we have not a single moment of peace, and I, praying for the serendipitous bolt of lightning which never comes.

§ **November 15.** I haven't written a thing this week, even my correspondence is neglected. Ah, but I did send a postcard to Lew, who responded immediately. He has a new chapbook out called *Wither*. I would like to write back with details of my own new chapbook, but alas, I have none. I've never had a chapbook and probably never will. I'll die with a handful of embarrassing poems and a lame short story or two to my name.

After a late breakfast at the Pinecrest and a brief shopping spree at Anthropologie, Lucie and I spent the day at Kenneth's; I've finished sorting through Paul's papers although there is yet work to be done on his website. Before we left, we chatted for a few minutes with Kenneth who amused us with tales of his "wild" days in Toledo; he was much, much wilder than one could have imagined. I felt quite the goody two-shoes in his presence.

We took a very civilized cab ride home, changed, then trekked through Chinatown and North Beach to meet Jeffrey and Sharon at a modest Irish pub called The Fiddler's Green. The food was quite edible; I had bangers and mash and a Guinness, but it was so noisy one had to shout. Sharon became animated when Jeffrey brought up the subject of politics, but I honestly couldn't hear a word she was saying; I merely nodded in vague acknowledgment at each pause. We at last took a walk to the Hyde Street Pier, which was closed, ending up on the beach at Victorian Park. It was a calm, cool evening; one could see across the bay clearly the porch lights of Sausalito and Tiburon. Alcatraz seemed so near I could imagine escaping from it with little difficulty. The four of us were going to walk home together, but when we saw the cable cars Lucie and I decided to take one home, a San Francisco treat of which I will never tire. This, the Hyde-Powell line, is the best value, meandering over Russian and Nob Hill and offering its passengers myriad postcard views of the city. It was one of those evenings when I am perfectly content to live here.



§ **November 17.** I slept no more than a few hours last night. I couldn't get comfortable, being at once hot and cold, covers on, now off; having drank a large glass of water before lights out, I had to get up every few minutes. My crap particle-board bed is on the verge of collapsing in a cheap cloud of sawdust; each time I get up or lie down, or turn over, or breathe deeply, or wiggle a toe, it creaks loudly. Presently I relocated to the floor so as not to disturb Lucie who was having her own difficulties sawing logs. This move interested Monty greatly; my presence in the middle of the carpet made the room new to him. He used this opportunity to crunch noisily his crunchies, sharpen his claws on the pink chair, then walk all over me with his pointy feet, which poked into my ribs like little pool cues.

Lucie stayed home, but since I had to move the car by 7:00 I was the first one to the office. In an odd burst of productivity, I worked so hard today my wrists ache from all the repetitive typing. (They do still as I type this.) By 4:45 I had finished a project in one day which I could reasonably have been expected to take several days to finish, which means I can get some writing done this week, perhaps make some progress on a *magnum opus*. I'm on the verge of starting a new story, but I'm dragging my feet; I think I have an idea, a flash of brilliance, but before I finish the first sentence I decide it's a failure and I dourly toss the page in the trash. If I retrieved now all those crumpled pages they would combined make the world's worst paragraph. Meanwhile, Lucie has heard from a prospective employer—good news, which means an imminent trip to the Middle West in a few weeks.

Lasagna for dinner while watching *Cold Comfort Farm*, good for a few chuckles. To bed at 10:00, after reading a couple of Dorothy Parker stories. What a clever girl she was; she makes it look so easy, her three-page stories. Why can't I write three miserable pages?

§ **November 18.** Alright, Dorothy Parker wasn't *that* clever; I could someday have written a story at least as good as "A Telephone Call." Her stories are amusing enough, but dentist's office reading, really. I don't want my stories to be merely amusing; I think I can do better than that. Easier bragged than done...

§ **November 19.** Another horrible night's sleep. When I wasn't spinning about I was having frightful dreams. There was a darkened room; it was 5:30 a.m. and Lucie had just come from the shower. I was about to take

mine, when I heard her call my name, alarmed. She was pointing at a nude young woman sitting on our bed. “Who are you?” I demanded. “What are you doing here? How did you get in here?” Her eyes, smeared with mascara, lacked pupils, which to me was indicative of demonic possession.

The young woman pointed at a door in the corner, a door which I had never noticed. It was open, but behind it was a solid, black wall.

Just then the alarm clock, which read “10:14”, started speaking in a female electronic voice, but all I caught was “...an event occurred at 10:14 a.m.” At the same time another voice, this one a man’s electronic voice, from another clock, the display of which read “88:88” said, “88:88.” A third clock, this one an antique, displayed the correct time but the hands were bent at right angles.

I seized the shoulders of the young woman, who resisted me with tiny fists. As I wrestled her out the door and thrust her down the stairs, the cats escaped the room. I caught Loulou, but Monty was already at the foot of the stairs. After calling for him repeatedly, he returned, but I saw his double disappear around the corner after the young woman, who was beckoning to him in a monotone, “Here, kitty...here.” She was lit from behind by pale rays of sunshine coming through a window; however, in our apartment it was still darkest night, the sun had not yet risen for us.

This afternoon Barbara Douthwaite from the EPA boarded the bus in which I rode and sat directly in front of me. I immediately buried my face in my book; we avoided each other’s gaze. As the bus made its way up Geary, I noticed her staring at my reflection in the window. I longed to bring up the subject of Dr. Wu, but that would be too mischievous. What’s strange is when we were colleagues, we were very friendly to each other; I remember talking about art together in her cubicle. Now we don’t even acknowledge each other, which suits me, really.

§ **November 22.** One encounters the worst sort of people on the interstate highways, especially the 5. Behind the wheel, one can be anonymous, and one’s true character is revealed in all its ugliness. Our Nissan was dwarfed by a constant parade of SUVs, all driven by the sickest ass clowns on the planet. Lucie and I almost ended up in a ditch outside Coalinga, victims of a depraved speed demon.

Chicken Kiev for dinner, on a plate with wilted asparagus and rice, straight out of the pages of *Better Homes and Gardens*, circa 1956. Helen

was generally agreeable on this evening. We talked about Dickens, genealogy, the demise of the English language and how the country is going to pot. She showed us her collection of *The Chronicles* magazines, gifts from Josh. After dessert of a pumpkin pie-cake hybrid, a recipe from Helen's bridge club, we retired to the library, which has been remodeled around a "medieval" motif—a miniature suit of armour on the desk, a gothic tapestry, a sword through a gargoyle's mouth on the wall above the computer. My brother would have loved it. When Helen wasn't looking, I opened a window; Lucie and I had asked her several times throughout the evening to turn the heat down but she kept turning it back up. But she saw me do it and complained, "I'm not going to heat the great outdoors!"

While Lucie taught Helen how to do things in Word, I tried in vain to set the ancient VCR clock, then sat in a leather chair and read the introduction to *The Bell Curve*, which was lying nearby. Helen wasn't listening to Lucie, who shouted things like, "Mom, be patient!" and "Quit clicking!" But in the end Lucie had success where Josh had not. "I asked Josh to teach me how to do these things but he is so *mean* to me, Lucie!"

§ **November 23.** Lucie and I accompanied Helen on several errands; I insisted on driving the Lincoln Town Car because I would not have Helen driving us into a ditch. Helen was more than happy to let me drive. "Julian is an *excellent* driver," she said to Lucie, before I had even pulled out of the garage. First stop, Home Depot, to pick up a Coleman propane grill for the patio. Afterwards, we went to Laguna Beach; Lucie had given back to Helen a couple of Navajo rugs given her some years ago, as we no longer had use for them, and Helen wanted to know their value. At the gallery Helen did all the talking. "How much are these rugs worth?" The proprietor said it depended. Helen interrupted him repeatedly as he explained that it would require a little research to arrive at an accurate appraisal. "Just tell me *how much*," she demanded. While Lucie tried to make Helen listen to the man behind the counter I made myself scarce across the room. At last the three of us took a walk along the trail overlooking the beach, but Helen kept lagging behind, leaning against the railing and putting the back of her hand to her forehead; *couldn't we go home now*, she pleaded.

Josh showed up at lunchtime in his gigantic dually pickup truck. "Josh, why don't you go set up the grill on the patio?"

"Awww, why do *I* have to do it?" Josh grimaced, making a face as if he had smelled something terrible.

“Julian will help you, you don’t mind, do you, Julian?”

I followed Josh to the patio, where he unpacked the grill, then stared dumbly at the various pieces. “I’ll read the instructions out loud,” I said, helpfully. Several minutes later, I was the one on my hands and knees while Josh reclined on a patio chair.

Helen appeared at the sliding glass door. “How’s it going out there, you two?”

“It says we need a bowl of soapy water and a paint brush, to test for leaks in the hose.”

“Josh, go out into the garage and get Julian a paint brush.”

“Awww, I don’t want to do that!” whined Josh. But he did do it. Soon the grill was working, and we had all removed to the medieval room. After Josh beat me three times in a row at chess, he became more animated. “Hey, Lucie!” he called over his shoulder; Lucie was teaching Helen something on the computer. “How come you always wear black?” Lucie looked up but did not answer.

“Hey, Lucie. Have you seen this?” he asked, pointing at the television. “This is a really great movie, you’d really *like* it.” It was some awful Mel Gibson movie, *Braveheart*, I think.

“Hey, Mom, are you gonna make piequat for dinner? It’s Lucie’s favourite.”

“Hey, Lucie, do you still listen to punk rock?”

It went on like this until dinner. Helen served piequat, bits of pork on the bone, in a salty brown sauce over rice. Josh ate his piequat with much gusto and gloating. “This is Lucie’s favourite,” he reminded us.

After a few barbed comments regarding the illegal immigrant driver’s license debacle, his Mexican wife Maria, six months pregnant, appeared with baby Colette who does not yet speak in tow. I remember I am an uncle, and ran upstairs to fetch the toy we brought for Colette. After we all exchanged air kisses, the pair left so they wouldn’t catch Lucie’s cold. Josh poured himself a drink from a bottle of something he retrieved from his truck; he and I went back upstairs alone, where he showed me his video game collection. I don’t know why I did it, but I feigned interest, and even played one game called *Grand Theft Auto*, the object of which was to kill everyone in sight. When I got up for a drink of water at 11:00, he was still playing it, his bottle of whatever he was drinking empty, Maria and Colette waiting for him at home, one block away.

§ **November 24.** Josh had to work, so it was just the three of us today. I at last figured out how to set the clock on the VCR; I otherwise made myself useful by hooking up Helen's hi-fi. Once the turntable was functioning, she bade me play an album of my choosing from her collection of chiefly works for organ, then told me to turn it up louder than I would ever have done were I alone, which surprised me. We bonded over classical music; I brought down our CDs and played her Lorenzo Ghielmi's *Anno 1630*, which we gave to her, then, when she said she also liked country music, we played her Doo Rag's *What We Do*, which she said sounded "authentic," but then added "This gets old quickly, take it off."

In the east wall of Helen's upstairs hallway may be found, among dozens of boyhood photographs, every ribbon, medal, certificate, trophy, prize, accolade, decoration, kudo, and gold star ever awarded to Josh for his achievements as a competitive swimmer, a shrine to a beloved son who can do no wrong in the water as well as out of it. On the west wall, old family photographs are arranged chronologically, from great uncles in sepia tones to a department store portrait of Lucie as a young woman. Helen pointed to it and said to Lucie, "You can have this one, if you want it."

§ **November 25.** We had no alarm clock, so Lucie's mother roused us at 5:00 by bursting into our room and shouting, "Rise and shine!" Having loaded the car last night, within minutes Lucie and I were speeding along the new toll road towards the 91 freeway. Six hours later we beheld a gloomy wall of smog which we took to be Las Vegas. We took the 215, which is so recent the underpasses are yet to be completed; between us and the mountains the rising land was blanketed by new houses, many of them unfinished, a city growing before our eyes. From our vantage point on the west side of town, I saw how Las Vegas has grown to immense proportions in a few years. Everything about us was new.

Nobody was home. Last week I had left a message on Mother's machine, telling her we were to arrive on Tuesday, and last night I e-mailed her to say we'd be there by noon; since it was only 11:00, we drove up Cheyenne to its end, then down a dirt road to the foot of a mountain, where we stretched our legs. I threw rocks at an abandoned toilet. Scampering among the nearby rocks we spied many chipmunks, always with their backs to us, fluffy tails wagging in the air. For laughs, we looked at a couple of new condominiums; a steal by San Francisco standards, all had been sold before they were even completed.

Over the next couple of hours we returned several times to Mother's; it became apparent that wires had been crossed, so we decided to stay the night at Paris Las Vegas. Lucie was still ill and I was exhausted from the long drive. I called Mother in the evening. She said she had started a new job yesterday; she had returned my e-mail but I of course hadn't seen it. I should have called, but it was no big deal, really; I told her we'd see her in the morning. Lucie and I ordered room service to the tune of \$71, then passed out in an air-conditioned stupor.

§ **November 26.** Lucie and I slept thirteen hours, until one o'clock; when I opened the heavy-duty hotel drapes I was momentarily blinded by the sun, which had been blazing for hours. I couldn't believe it when I looked down and saw people swimming in a massive pool in fifty-degree weather. I wondered at the expense of heating such a pool, but then realized where I was. I had to chuckle upon reading a sign in the bathroom which read, "Please help us conserve water by reusing your towels." Why bother? We dressed, then drove to Mother's across town, which took forty-five minutes. Upon arrival we took our places on the divan and stayed there the rest of the afternoon and evening, talking with Mother and Danny, flipping through albums of photographs and swapping anecdotes; we watched *Highball* which Mother said was "different," but I think she liked it anyway.

Mother wanted us to stay on the sofa bed, but we wanted to be comfortable, so after dark we got on the freeway and drove until we saw a hotel called Santa Fe Station Hotel & Casino. As Lucie undressed I went downstairs to seek provisions; beyond the slot machines and a maze of tables was a series of fast food establishments. I had to negotiate my way through a queue of old people waiting in line for free pumpkin pies; additional crowds awaited me on the other side, retirees scooting among the tables with pumpkin pie vouchers in hand. With all the beeping and music, I felt as if I were in a video game, a spaceship dodging one asteroid after another, making its way to a distant refueling station, in this case a Quiznos. On my way back to our room, I spent a handful of nickels on a slot machine, winning \$27.50.

Our room is rather shabby, smelling of stale cigarette smoke and mop water. A table by the window has illegible graffiti carved into it, the carpet beneath stained by what appears to have been a crime of passion. After shoveling substandard Philly cheesesteaks down our throats, Lucie and I watched *The Poseidon Adventure*, then turned out the lights.

§ **November 27.** Lucie and I were awakened at about nine by a piercing alarm which seemed to last forever. When I called the front desk, a woman answered and said impatiently, “We are aware of the problem and are working to solve it.” When it finally stopped, I removed my hands from my ears and look at them, expecting to see blood.

Lucie and I had weak appetites and thus did not overindulge of Thanksgiving dinner. After dessert, we removed to the living room and watched *The American Pie*, a stink bomb of a film which Lucie and I found profoundly offensive, but we held our tongues in the spirit of holiday communion. When I disappeared into the kitchen to freshen Lucie’s grapefruit juice, Mother said to her, “Julian and his friends were *just like this* in high school,” gesturing toward the screen.

For the record, my friends and I were decidedly *not* like that in high school. If my school days must be represented by a film, I’d like to think they were more like *The 400 Blows*—escaping class for the cinema, stealing typewriters, and telling preposterous lies.

Mother has a great capacity for laughter and will watch just about anything billed as a comedy; I knew *The American Pie* wouldn’t be my cup of tea, but I was unprepared for its merciless onslaught of easy sight gags, toilet humour, and retarded male masturbatory fantasy. During the scene when young Mr. Stifler drinks the ejaculate-contaminated beer, I broke into a cold sweat; the experience of watching this scene in my mother’s presence could itself have been a scene from *The American Pie*.

§ **December 3.** Due to my habitual costume of tweed, I am accustomed to Bruno and the Unabomber greeting me at the bus depot with, “Do you have a job interview today?” Today, however, I wore denim jeans and a black turtleneck, causing the duo to elbow each other and crack wise, “You look like you work on one of those ships.” I responded with a wink and a good-natured, “Aye, Cap’n,” uttered in the manner of a pirate, which elicited further chuckles from my unwanted traveling companions. It occurs to me I could avoid these two jokers in future by taking the 7:30 bus.

My friendship with Bruno is chiefly due to our shared interest in classical music. He always asks what I’ve been listening to; this morning when I told him Weissenberg playing Rachmaninov he said, nonchalantly, “I met him, backstage at a recital in Michigan.”

Really?” Bruno, it seems, has met everyone.

"I *slept* with him," he added, with a wink. Now, whenever I listen to the Preludes, I must struggle to banish from my mind the image of hairy old Bruno, naked in Alexis Weissenberg's arms.

§ **December 7.** Our building's holiday party was in full swing when we arrived at 6:00. We had not yet eaten dinner, so we headed straight for the buffet tables, heedless of any lessons we had learned from the abominable Hallowe'en party buffet. I piled my plastic plate high with pot luck foodstuffs—meatballs, lasagna, potato salad, hummus, and cream puffs, all of which I washed down in minutes with a grape soda. Meanwhile, Lucie was cornered by Derrick; when I rushed to her aid, Derrick said he wanted to shew us the lobby restroom, which had been recently remodeled under his direction. As he had attempted to do with the lobby, he had sought to restore the restroom to its original Art Déco splendour, a commendable objective. However, once again he failed to succeed, choosing a ridiculous "faux finish" which steadfastly suggests the '90s rather than the '30s.

Back in the lobby, I spied Mr. Ffolliot sitting alone on the divan; when I sat next to him he lit up like a Christmas tree. Grateful for companionship, he began to talk at once about Bill's death, but moments later, Priscilla, the Filipino from the twentieth floor, started singing "Beautiful Saviour"; at once a solemn hush fell across the room as all eyes turned toward Priscilla. I took this opportunity to return to the buffet, whereby I consumed another plateful of lasagna and cream puffs as the slightly out of tune operatic singing continued.

Then James appeared, Lucie and I joined him in a corner where we commenced to talking about literature. We were soon interrupted when the Juicy Bitch and then Edward sat down among us; the conversation was at once reduced to small talk, but when the Juicy Bitch left to answer a call on her portable telephone and Edward became distracted by an acquaintance, James resumed our discussion, which had in fact become more of a soliloquy about his writing. When Edward realised we were still taking about writing, I overheard him joke to his companion, "I feel like an outsider at the Algonquin Round Table."

At last, when only the three of us remained but for the cleaning committee, Lucie and I excused ourselves; on the way to the elevator I noticed Mr. Ffolliot still seated on the divan, alone, staring into space, his hands before him atop his cane.



§ **December 27.** Lucie and I spent the week in Gualala with her mother; both of us were unwell, spending most of our time sleeping and reading before the fireplace or watching old movies while Lucie's mother visited nearby museums, cemeteries, and points of historical interest. The first few days it rained, sometimes violently, or there was wind and thick fog; the weather suited our gloominess. Lucie's mother threatened to scream if any of us should acknowledge Christmas, which plodded by like any other random weekday. Despite being unwell, this morning Lucie and I took the lonely back roads through the mountains, which takes longer but appeals to us more.



# Chapter 6

## 2004

§ **February 14.** Lucie and I saw a matinée of Bertolucci's new film, *The Dreamers*; it was very much in the spirit of the *nouvelle vague*, set in Paris during the '68 riots. The audience took a long time to settle down; a man behind us kept speaking to his wife in a normal voice, as if they were alone in their own home; his wife kept laughing at everything, things which weren't funny. Oddly, a hush fell over the room as soon as the first frank sex scene began; one could hear a pin drop – now it was I who stifled a laugh. Typical of all the foreign films we see, Lucie and I spoke of it all evening, examining it for meaning; dialog-heavy and taking place chiefly in a romantically decrepit apartment, the film would have made a fine play. Jean-Pierre Léaud made a brilliant appearance as himself, reading the same speech he read some 35 years ago on the occasion of the Langlois Affair.

§ **February 16.** At last we receive TV5, an all-French television station. Lucie and I watch it constantly now; last night we watched Chabrol's *Les Cousins* (which isn't even available on VHS) with French rather than English subtitles; to my delight I found I could understand almost everything, but without the subtitles I am hopelessly lost, which proves I *know* French, I just can't understand it. Of course, I often have trouble understanding spoken English, especially what they're calling English these days.

§ **February 17.** Black skies and howling wind; the flag atop the Hilton is blowing *up* more than in any other direction. Lucie and I watched a compelling Hungarian film called *Vakvagany*, in which the happy, young subjects, a boy and a girl, of a box of 8mm home movies from the '50s are revealed to have grown into a semi-retarded oaf and a paranoid xenophobe, respectively. The narration, chiefly by the irritating James Ellroy and a taciturn psychiatrist, left something to be desired, but the commentary of film studies professor Stan Brakhage was always relevant and at times illuminating. I wonder if Von Bunko has seen it?

Speaking of Von Bunko, I dreamt about him last night. In my dream, I had somehow become rich and pledged to help my struggling artist friends. I gave Von Bunko funds for his film *Slug* and I arranged an exhibition of his “Adolescent Works, 1967-1977” which consisted of crude computer drawings of murder scenes which otherwise resembled early Atari games, and a series of digitally-manipulated photographs of “Flesh Furniture”—chairs made of human faces, tables with actual human and animal legs, a human skin rug with head still attached, and so forth.

§ **February 18.** Lucie and I took the car to Bed, Bath & Beyond, where employees are obliged, seemingly under pain of death such is their zeal, to ask every twelve seconds or so, “Are you finding everything O.K.?” Of course, whenever we do have a question, there are no employees in sight. In addition, shoppers are forced to hear insipid popular tunes from hundreds of speakers located on the ceiling, too high to puncture, explode or otherwise disable. On this evening, however, I retaliated in a novel manner. Scattered throughout the store are various listening stations for a series of albums the purpose of which is unclear to me; at each of them, I selected *Bach for the Bath* then turned the volume controls to their maximum setting. Similarly, I turned up the volume of every demonstration video, “nature sounds” clock radio, “retro” jukebox-styled radio, and any other musical merchandise I encountered. As I strolled nonchalantly away from a thundering rendition of “My Girl”, I could hear Lucie laughing from the nearby bedding department. Besides making oneself feel better, being childish on occasion helps one from becoming a curmudgeon, although I fear it’s too late.

§ **February 19.** Andrew has sent me a carbon copy of the completed first draft of his novel, over a hundred single-spaced, typewritten pages. Imagine the olden days when one was obliged to write with pen and ink! He has

spent these last few months in obscurity, pounding away at the keys of his ancient Smith Corona typewriter. I am delighted but also somewhat envious; I *talk* about writing, I keep a notebook of story ideas, mysterious characters, poetic phrases, and compelling words but I write nothing – nothing but these inconsequential scribblings, that is. Should I prattle on like this for decades, will a distinguished literary establishment eventually publish my *Journal of an aesthete*? A reckless vanity press, perhaps. Most of the one thousand signed copies would doubtless remain piled under my bed, to be found after my death and tossed into Glad bags before being driven to the landfill.

§ **February 20.** Last night I dreamt I was recruited as bassist for Linda Carter’s (of “Wonder Woman” fame) band. Since she was the principal songwriter, all I had to do was take orders. After months of dreary afternoon rehearsals in a Noe Valley recreation center, she pronounced our act ready for the road; our first performance was to be a Lesbian wedding in Riverside, followed the next night by a Sierra Club fundraiser in Yreka, some seven hundred miles to the north. I awoke in a cold sweat, thankful I no longer even *own* a bass guitar.

Have I become another Charles Pooter, who, in his *Diary of a Nobody*, bores his dinner companions with long-winded accounts of his dreams from the night before? Today, yes.

§ **February 22.** Everyone at the library was stamping their feet for a book called *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*; the waiting list is two miles long. It was crowded and people got on my nerves; there was the woman who clicked her mouse maniacally, several times in rapid succession when once would have sufficed; what was I to tell her, to stop doing it? “Excuse me, but you’ll kill the poor thing.” A semi-retarded young girl approached me and announced too loudly for a library, “Do you have a pet? I’m starting my own pet business!” A man with a curly beard turned on his lap-top computer, which emitted an alarming boot-up tune. An unattended portable telephone rang through several bars of Mozart’s *Symphony in G Minor*, nearly ruining the piece for me. At last, a man clad head-to-toe in Spandex sat before a public internet station, his bicycle upside-down to his left; I didn’t know what the noise was until I stood up and saw him spinning his pedal absent-mindedly.

Today’s reference questions included:

1. "I need a book on landscaping...landscaping in Africa."
2. "I'm doing a report on the U.N. and poverty in Indonesia."
3. "I found a painting that's probably by Dufy in my basement; I want to know how much it's worth."
4. "Do you have *The Da Vinci Code*?"
5. "I'm looking for a book; I don't know the title but it's by Don somebody; it's about types, you know, like your *type*?" (Answer: *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*.)

§ **February 25.** A terrific storm has arrived, bringing high winds, heavy rain, lightning and hail; at one point the hail had accumulated on the building below us to a degree which resembled snow. Before dusk we drove out to the Sutro Baths ruins to watch the waves; the wind was deafening, bringing with it sand which stung our faces. I noticed a monstrous new building, a new Cliff House; each edifice erected since the original has been progressively worse than the one before it; this new construction resembles a cheerless gymnasium. After a few minutes we got back into the car; as we were driving by the Palace of the Legion of Honor a rather large spider appeared before my face, startling me. As I pulled over Lucie, who abhors arachnids, screamed, "Smash it!" As I did so, I accidentally shattered a portion of the windshield with my wrist.

On the way home we stopped by Green Apple Books; while browsing the fiction, I was mortified when two girls overheard me absent-mindedly repeating the name "Hawthorne" to myself in a British accent. Lucie and I departed with an essential addition to our library, a fat tome entitled *One Thousand Buildings of Paris*.

Because it was in English I didn't want to give it a chance, but Edward Dmytryk's 1959 remake of *The Blue Angel* was in fact exemplary; the professor's clown bellowing scene was one of those classic existential moments in cinema, a metaphor for all human suffering. Why clowns are so effective in this regard I don't know, but they are.

§ **February 26.** Lucie and I slept until noon, then walked down to a sporting goods store so I could purchase a swimsuit, as my vintage wool one has at last disintegrated. I tried on several, regarding my pasty, lumpy body in the three-way mirrors with dismay. Lucie and I are going to start

swimming at the Sheehan Hotel, as soon as their pool reopens. Ever since we acquired a parking space we walk less often. I can't abide gymnasiums but swimming pools can be pleasant enough, *sans* screaming brats.

Dinner with Kenneth and Alfred at the Jeanne d'Arc; the food was second-drawer but we found much to talk about. Kenneth once again charmed us with outrageous anecdotes of his wild youth—the time he was a waiter for a fancy restaurant (where he painted the scalp around his mohawk to resemble a full head of hair) and let a bottle of champagne erupt all over a disliked patron, or the time he danced at the Nob Hill Theater, appearing on stage in a bloody wedding dress then later as a vampire surrounded by candles and macabre props before a horrified audience. Poor Alfred somehow splashed chocolate sauce on my coat; I pretended it was nothing, but I hope the stain comes out because it's a favourite.

§ **February 27.** . Mr. Ffoliot from his own pocket has commissioned for our building's lobby two Lempicka paintings, the *Portrait of Ira* and *Adam and Eve*. Already, *Adam and Eve* has caused much dissention among the building's residents, some of whom object to the nudity. After only a few days the *Adam and Eve* has disappeared; I don't know what has become of it.

*Rats...I seem to have deleted this whole month by clicking the wrong icon or something. These blasted computers!*

§ **April 1.** . Lucie and I at ten o'clock walked to terrible H&R Block to have our taxes done; the homunculus who last time called Lucie "Sir" (how curvaceous Lucie could ever be mistaken for a Sir boggles one's mind) didn't call her "Sir" on this occasion, but did fail to announce our presence to our tax consultant as we sat waiting in wobbly plastic chairs for over forty minutes. We liked our tax consultant, who was well-dressed and polite and over six feet tall. Her deft calculating earned us a refund, a miracle. "Do you want to contribute \$3 to go to the Presidential Election Campaign Fund?" she asked and we all had a hearty laugh. Lucie and I found her elegant and she seemed charmed by us; when we quit the premises it was all smiles and warm handshakes while the homunculus scowled and kept us waiting for our receipt with her phones and paper piles and hairy warts. *Femmes, femmes* on TV5, a gem of '70s French cinema unavailable elsewhere; I feel so clever to have seen it.

§ **April 2.** At the office I rearranged my furniture but owing to the death of architecture it's still a wretched cardboard box which no amount of antiquarian books, *objets d'art*, and eclectic furnishings can brighten. And Schippers has moved into Diane's old office. He complains about my medieval polyphony while he shouts into his speaker-phone all day, our walls are thin as tissue.

I left for my doctor's appointment early because I wanted to spend my \$115 credit at Black Oak Books, but I couldn't get anywhere near the freeway. I was obliged to wander through the East Bay until I ended up on the lowly 880; I took the San Mateo Bridge and later found out the cause of the mess was a man on the Bay Bridge, for thirteen hours threatening to hurl himself into the bay. Such an unimaginative way to snuff oneself!

Chimes appeared on our doorstep at seven and we took the car to the Bistro E Europe; while the last time it was standing room only on this night the place was empty but for two paying customers and the proprietor and his wife. The rosy-cheeked gentleman remembered us; "There is nobody here to-night, all our customers come from Berkeley." The girls at the next table were friendly to us, but Lucie and I shrank away; this would have been Chimes's chance to flirt but he simply stared at his hands. The girls, apparently sisters, had green dots glued to their foreheads as did the proprietor and his wife; I didn't want to encourage them by asking what it meant.

After we ordered, the band, calling themselves Danubius, arrived, complaining about the traffic on the bridge but in good spirits nonetheless. They unpacked every wonderful instrument imaginable – tamburas, kavals, gadulkas, accordions, ocarinas, and a cimbalom of staggering beauty, and began to play assorted traditional tunes from Eastern Europe. I bought their album, but it sounds not as spontaneous and raw as their spirited performance during which wrong notes were played, feet were stomped and foreign tongues were shouted; I was so pleased I laughed at much of it. Chimes, however, when he wasn't teasing Lucie and being generally disagreeable, kept glancing at his watch and yawning, big, gaping, crooked yawns. Perhaps he has grown tired of us, although Lucie and I were both fatigued and eager ourselves to return home and slip under the covers.

§ **April 3.** Lucie bounced out of bed at 7:30; soon, I was up, too and dressed before I knew what time it was. Since it was so early, we went to Dottie's for breakfast but the queue stretched out the door; nevertheless, we stayed and had a delicious repast. We met some tourists from Edmonton, an



older couple who were marvelously kind; they asked us what to see and do and we revealed to them a few secrets. Later, a man who had overheard us asked, “What was the restaurant you told those people about?” and another fat gentleman from Atlanta asked us if we were restaurant critics; with him we talked about food but he had a way of speaking while facing the opposite direction, the words curled around his head like whispered racing tips.

Lucie and I, after taking the Presidio House Tour and viewing their exhibit on the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915, explored the rest of the Presidio, its miraculously well-preserved neighborhoods and cemetery, which in all the time we have lived in San Francisco had never seen. Many of the historic houses are now available for rent but cost more than our mortgage and much more than we could even afford on librarians’ paltry salaries. I was surprised at the pastoral aspect of some of the neighborhoods, so near to the chaos of the city.

*Chez nous*, as we quit the elevator we squeezed by the scantily-clad Veronica who for some reason was carrying hundreds of Wells Fargo deposit envelopes. I know nothing about this diminutive woman except for her name, her penchant for hiding behind the potted trees in the lobby, and her reputation for heavy drug use and freely given sexual favours on the roof deck. I do hope she doesn’t burn down our building someday.

§ **April 8.** Chimes is in hospital after an emergency appendectomy. Lucie and I paid him a visit at the prison-like Kaiser hospital; within, I imagined I was in a banana republic. On the wall were two child’s drawings; I asked who made them and Chimes replied that it was his friend Amy, who had gone out for a tofu burger but would return soon. Upon sight of her she rubbed me against the grain; some might call her a gentle giant but I would call her an oaf. For a while she had us all scribbling on photocopied Celtic designs with Crayola markers, it was really too dull. As we made our excuses, it was forced hugs all ’round (how could I refuse?); poor Chimes, but I now realize that I don’t really know him very well; the few friends of his I have met have been of the starry-eyed white witch vegan variety, quite the opposite of myself. Meanwhile, Chimes seemed to accept passively every indignation imposed upon him by the hospital staff, few of which seemed to speak any English. Lucie rallied to obtain for him a fan (the windows were bolted closed and the room was stuffy and apparently *heated* on this warm spring afternoon); she also placed a sign on the door dissuading confused interns from opening the door to see if the housekeeper was there: “The

housekeeper is not here. Do not disturb.” Of course, none could read it and the interruptions continued. As we left, Chimes wanted us to take the sign down; it seemed to embarrass him for some reason.

Not counting our old friends, the ones from our youth, Lucie and I have been largely inept at making new friends. I am socially defective myself, always uncomfortable in most social situations to a degree which must be incomprehensible to others. I find fault with everyone but even more so with myself, wherein lies the problem; I put my foot in my mouth, I inadvertently offend, I alienate others, I myself am alienated. After a social event, I analyze every word that was spoken, every gesture, every facial expression. What could I have done or said differently? Ultimately, I resolve to never socialize again; I’m happiest when alone with Lucie. At the same time, I find people an endless source of fascination; they are so different than I. I like to study them as an entomologist studies insects, or a botanist flowers, a botanist with pollen allergies.

I have started an anthology of modern writing from *transition* magazine and I find that I hate just about everything in it, especially the poetry (except that of Laura Riding, about whom I’d like to know more). But the modern movement was of course inevitable and much good has come from it. Without it we would have no Fitzgerald, a preposterous idea.

§ **April 9.** I left the office at noon to inquire about harmoniums at the Ali Akbar College of Music in San Rafael, which has a small store in which are sold exotic musical instruments from India. How astonished was I upon my arrival; the shop was filled with the most marvelous objects – harmoniums, sitars, tablas, sarodes, &c. A kind employee shewed me all the harmoniums, how they work, how they are played, and so forth; he then demonstrated to me each of the other instruments. Ah, the sweet drone of the sarode! I will bring Lucie to this place on her birthday so she may choose her harmonium; until then I can barely conceal my excitement at the discovery of this magical place. I want to tell her all about what I learned, but it’s a *surprise*. I did leave with a recording of Ali Akbar Khan playing two morning *rags* on the sarode with tabla accompaniment (I can’t even play this for her yet because she might wonder where I acquired it). A new world of music to explore, when I thought I had heard everything...

§ **April 10.** Despite a rather nasty cold, I was obliged to work at my office for several hours due to the “Dilbert”-like ineptitude of my superiors. I returned home not to the hoped for afternoon of naps, tea, and Dodie Smith, but to some sort of a music festival at the Tenderloin Recreation Center behind our building. From the 16th-floor deck I looked down to see a ten-piece Santana cover band playing before a playground of no more than two dozen children. The music was amplified as for a football stadium; Lucie and I shut the windows (which makes the apartment stuffy) and covered our ears with pillows, to no avail. At last I complained in person to the director(?), who is always smiles and giggles but of little help: “They have permit (giggle),” “It’s only one day a year (giggle),” “They stop in five minute (giggle),” but I finally was able to upset her when I suggested I acquire a permit (they must hand them out like candy), set up my amplifier outside her bedroom window and play Santana records all afternoon. Her response was unintelligible.

§ **April 18.** A pic-nic in the drizzle with Lucie before taking my place behind the reference desk. I was asked three questions today, the first two for which I found ready answers on the “world wide web” while the third I found in Janet Flanner’s *Paris Was Yesterday, 1925-1939*.

1. “When did the last passenger pigeon die?” asked by a woman on the telephone.

2. “How does one spell Ruth Reichl’s last name?” asked by a man who later checked out a pile of books by M.F.K. Fisher and about cuisine in general.

3. “What notable politician was assassinated in Paris in 1932?” asked by a charming elderly woman who had been in Paris at the time. She was having her diary transcribed but neither her nor the typist could read the man’s name, which started with a D.

A Japanese “delegation” of three gentlemen appeared; one of them asked me in a whisper if they could photograph the library; his breath smelled nice. Afterwards, they then explored the rest of the building at leisure. I could hear them in the corridor laughing in Japanese.

Lucie read French magazines while I answered correspondence; I also read a charming little Beatrix Potter book. How perfect it would be for little baby Colette, who has just started to read. Who knows what kinds of awful books Josh and Maria are giving her.

§ **April 22.** Lucie and I departed by automobile at seven, taking Hwy. 1 from Santa Cruz. We made several stops along the way; at a farmer's market near Watsonville we purchased a basket of just-picked strawberries; we walked along a deserted stretch of beach at Carmel River State Park – here, I for the first time beheld starfish, a crab, and sea anemone in their natural habitat; we took our luncheon by a creek at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park – we learned here that blue jays will eat grapes but not strawberries. We hiked up a canyon to observe a scenic waterfall; and we observed hundreds of young, albeit enormous, elephant seals molting on the beach.

Near Big Sur, we stopped to visit the Henry Miller Memorial Library. The property is littered with bohemian sculpture (a giant cocoon, a crucifixion of computer monitors and cables); there is also an outdoor theater, a lush clearing surrounded by tall trees. The library itself appeared to be a bookstore (I didn't ask at the time, but I later found out there was a library in another room) which stocks all the usual books by and about Miller plus a few less common ones (such as *Henry Miller: The Paris Years* by Robert Cross, which we purchased), as well as other books, postcards, and so forth. The walls are adorned with interesting posters, photographs, drawings, and paintings; in particular I admired a series of watercolours by a person called "Timar" taken from the Deux-Rives edition of *Tropic of Cancer*. Miller detested them, but I found them lovely and wouldn't mind having reproductions of them (the Deux-Rives edition, published loose-leaf in a box, is rather expensive). The proprietor is a knowledgeable and enthusiastic Swede called Magnus; when we entered, he was playing Yann Tiersen's *C'était ici*, so we instantly bonded. He said he would consider making color photocopies of the Timar illustrations for me, but he first has to inquire about their copyright. Just as we were about to leave, a card on the wall caught my eye advertising the sale in 2002 by PBA Galleries of Miller's handwritten *Paris Notebooks, 1932-1936* in three volumes. How I wish someone would publish a facsimile of them!

After checking into our motel, we explored the neighboring town of Cambria; we walked through its cemetery which was rather uninteresting but for some of its plain, wooden tombstones. After walking down the pier at San Simeon we explored the nearby village which consisted chiefly of a half-dozen charming houses built by Julia Morgan.

None of the restaurants in Cambria appealed to us, so we returned to our motel which was situated among a dozen other dismal-looking motels; we had given up our search for a decent evening meal when at last we discovered

a “family-style” Mexican restaurant called El Chorlito, which turned out to be to our taste; it reminded Lucie and I both of our childhoods. I attacked my “combination platter” with gusto while Lucie nursed two shrimp tacos and a margarita; we returned to our motel satiated and in high spirits. We read for a few hours before turning out the lights at 10:00.

§ **April 23.** We arrived at the Hearst Castle visitor’s center at 8:00 to pick up our tickets. We slipped past the photographer (who was photographing a man who was speaking on a cordless telephone), and soon we were winding up a mountain in a tour bus; a recording of a woman explained in a syrupy, rather supercilious (I thought) voice various superficial aspects of the estate in terms of acres, gallons, and feet (along with their metric equivalents – Lucie and I had to laugh each time she used the word “hectometers”), and of course, dollars.

Lucie and I took all of the four tours; by the end of the day we had seen much of the main house, the guest houses, and the gardens (where we learned that squirrels will eat tangerines). I fear I cannot write of it without spewing forth an endless stream of banal platitudes and hyperbole; suffice it to say that Hearst Castle is among my very most favourite places on earth. What makes it perhaps more appealing than even our most cherished châteaux in France is its “homeyness”; its human scale, intimate interiors, and eclectic mix of furnishings would make it a quite comfortable residence indeed; it’s easy to visualize oneself living there, as opposed to the cold emptiness of Chambord or the regal vastness of Versailles. I would perhaps compare it favorably to Chenonceaux or Montrésor. However, it is the ten-room Casa del Monte, constructed in the style of 16th-century Spanish Renaissance, which most closely resembles the ideal abode of both Lucie and me; indeed, we shall dream of it for evermore.

After the final tour we watched an insipid film which lavished praise upon Hearst as if he were the greatest man to ever walk the earth (I give Julia Morgan sole credit for the brilliant splendour of La Cuesta Encantada); we then returned to El Chorlito for another feast. Back at our motel room, we read our books peacefully until a family with children settled in the room next door; we never had to endure a greater din. It sounded like the whole family were wrestling each other, throwing each other against the walls with terrific force, shouting, and bawling. Just when I was on the verge of pounding the wall with my fist, or calling them on the telephone, or knocking on their door (this I was afraid to do), there came the most tremendous thud of all

– indeed, the entire building shook like the shoddily-constructed shoe box it was. I was astonished – what the deuce were these people doing in there? But it was Lucie who correctly pronounced there had been an earthquake (later, we felt another gentler temblor just before dawn).

§ **April 27.** At noon I took Lucie to the Ali Akbar School of Music so she could choose a harmonium; we ended up spending two hours talking about them and other instruments with the staff. I had to talk myself out of leaving with a sarode; fortunately, I keep my fingernails too short to play it correctly, although perhaps a thimble might work? Lucie chose the one I liked best, a dark instrument from Paul & Co. with capri blue and violet bellows and reinforced edges of silver filigree; it has a softer tone than the others, sounding almost like an accordion. We rushed home to see a documentary about organs (and harmoniums) on Trio, which was a pleasant coincidence; afterwards, we walked down the street to buy Lucie some sheet music of Satie's *Gnossiennes*. I wanted Lucie to hear Nico's *Desertshore*, on which Nico plays a harmonium, but of course none of the three stores I went to had it, although I did find the bleak *Marble Index*, which I had almost forgotten existed. We listened to it in the car on the way to Da Flora; it was better than I had remembered it, even.

To our dismay, Da Flora was closed for a private party; there had been some confusion about our reservations. Dragging our feet, Lucie and I wandered about North Beach; we peered longingly into the windows of the mysterious Aria on Grant Street, a store at which I can imagine the Quay Brothers shopping for their film sets. I adore North Beach, but really, most of its restaurants are too trendy or seem to cater to tourists. In the end we drove to the Baker Street Bistro, but its appeal to us has for some reason waned considerably (although they were playing Yann Tiersen, for which they receive many bonus points). With so many restaurants to choose from, only Da Flora we have deemed worthy of repeat visits.

§ **April 30.** Lucie and I spent the afternoon in Berkeley in our favourite shops – Lacis, Tail of the Yak, and so forth, drooling over the beautiful things; we did leave the disappointingly named Mixed Pickles with a lovely Spanish Renaissance-style wrought iron chandelier for our dressing room. At five we met Harriet-Camille and Felix at Chez Panisse, where we had an uproarious time while our fellow diners glanced at us censoriously. Af-

terwards, we took a drive in the hills to see the rose garden and the Maybeck houses, including the Temple of the Wings.

As I write this, as at other times on occasion, I hate my journal. All I seem to do is recount the day's events like some student of journalism. I leave behind a record of one person's quotidian existence which all but a couple of friends would regard with contempt, ridicule, or incomprehension. I usually have no excuse but laziness and apathy, although lately I have been trying to make progress on a novel; what little time I can muster in order to write I must use for it, which means I might have to abandon these pages for a while, at least until I have made some progress on my novel and can confidently set it aside (perhaps then I will stop whining). The whole affair is terribly difficult, but I have managed to scribble a rather detailed outline and perhaps eleven pages of actual text, but as with every endeavour artistic I am hindered by self-doubt and indecision. Should I use the first or third person? Should the story take place in Paris (I set myself up for numerous difficulties) or San Francisco (this is the easier option and allows me greater opportunities); even now I could switch from one to the other, tossing my eleven pages of hard work. These eleven pages are the longest work of fiction I have ever written, longer even than the one lame short story I wrote several years ago. If only writing fiction was as simple as writing in one's journal! But why shouldn't it be? *I Capture the Castle* is a young woman's journal (albeit a fictional one); however, I happen to know that Dodie Smith agonized for years over that book, sitting straight up in bed every night with worry over a sentence, a word, a period. I look forward to sitting straight up in bed myself, agonizing over my own sentences, words, and periods; my agony so far has been limited to whining, tossing my notebook aside in disgust, and moping.

§ **May 4.** I accompanied Lucie to the doctor; while I waited for her I perused a *Time* magazine for a fascinating glimpse into the mind of the average American—the fear, the paranoia, the willful anti-intellectualism, and the obsession with money, fame, and all things superficial—diet fads, \$17,000 riding lawnmowers (one man referred to his as “my toy”) with built-in cup holders, dubious ‘sitcom’ celebrities, and the detailed coverage of the life and death in Iraq of a former football player—coverage which frankly would have been non-existent but for his employment on a professional sports team.

§ **May 7.** Indian food for dinner in San Rafael, followed by a screening of *Henry & June* at the San Rafael Film Center. Director Philip Kaufman and his wife were there to answer questions afterward. I had a dozen burning questions but was continually ignored by the moderator who I presume couldn't see beyond the third row of seats; I was embarrassed by the quality of others' questions, which invariably had to do with the film's rating controversy (which really has less to do with the film and more to do with America's fear of sexuality when it is presented in any manner which is not crude) or trivial details of Nin and Miller's personal lives which could have been gleaned from their biographies.

§ **May 8.** Lucie and I spent the morning exploring Tiburon, then we caught a double feature in Sausalito of *Bon Voyage* and *Good Bye, Lenin!*, both slight films, in my opinion. Oh, when will *The Saddest Music in the World* be released? How I wish we hadn't missed it at the S.F. International Film Festival.

Once home, we finished watching our Alec Guinness boxed set. Sometimes I feel like all I care about is film. If only it weren't so difficult to make films, which I would have loved to do (it is presumably too late for this old timer). I find I think "cinematically" when I write—maybe I should attempt a screenplay?

nothing but wine, dine, watch films, and read—I've just begun Henry Miller's *Letters to Emil*. In them, Miller documents his progress as a writer, a process which has always fascinated me. I find it miraculous that these letters should exist—but he made a conscious effort to save them because that's what writers do. I've always believed myself a dreadful letter writer; as in my early journals, I do little but recount recent events, with little analysis or introspection. Ideas are usually absent. I never kept a copy of a letter I wrote; in fact, most of my correspondence is now by courriel, and I don't save those, either. Nor have I kept any letters written to me, although I have lately kept those of Andrew, who writes and who is the most likely person I know whose letters would be of value to posterity as well as to me. It's always the early letters of one's career I find the most interesting, chronicles of artistic development; I am thinking of those of Miller, naturally, but also of Nin, Fitzgerald, and Waugh. One cannot underestimate the influence of these letters on my own growth as a writer, and in particular, a letter writer. Until now I am sure I must scribble the dullest letters in the world, letters which bring to mind the telegram in their brevity and spirit. There are some



for whom a thoughtful missive from me is long overdue.

Whenever I have a day off, I am generally appalled by my paralysis of mind and limb. Is this how I would behave if I didn't have to work for a living? Lie on the divan until I cannot rise from it, until I no longer even wish to? At least I did manage to write. Of course, if it weren't for a depressing case of folliculitis I might have wanted to get out and do something. Lucie and I might have gone on a picnic, or a walked to the ocean, although we probably would have just gone to the cinema. I am always careful to use the words *film* and *cinema* instead of *movie*, when possible; I don't mean to be a snob about it, but I suppose that is how I invariably come across to people who watch movies when I use such words. But what is the difference between a film and a movie? Film is the domain of artists; movies are that of the money grubbers, the butchers, the censors, the pan and scanners. Barbara at the library, who complains about the "black bars on the screen", watches movies. My uncle, who won't read a subtitle, watches movies. There is a new cable network, Trio, which shows films of quality, but which censors the "bad" words. But I think I know what is happening. Judging by the quality of its programming, the network is undoubtedly the brainchild of people with intelligence—lovers of art, poetry, and truth. Their financial backers are undoubtedly the villains. They, and the FCC. `jp align="left`

§ **June 2.** On my way to meet Lucie at the train depot, I encountered two filthy young people (too old for skateboards but sitting on them nonetheless), one of whom asked, "You aren't *Jewish*, are you?"; this caused both to snicker like schoolboys. There is something about me which for some reason has always caused people to glance at me askew, but to the best of my knowledge, neither my physiognomy nor my garments bring to mind the Jewish profession. Upon relating this anecdote to W., he recommended I should have whipped the ragamuffins with a sword cane, but I have none.

§ **June 8.** At the office we have a temporary employee whose name I still haven't learned; I was about to call her a compulsive talker, but I don't know if she's that way with everyone or just me. Whenever she sees me, she compliments my clothing, the way my cubicle is decorated, or the music I'm listening to. As I type this now, I realise it sounds like she likes me, but I don't suppose it's true. Today she said to me, "I have a CD I think you'd like. I'll be right back." While she retrieved the CD, I thought to myself, "Oh, no," because my tastes are so peculiar and fussy it's not really possible that

a random colleague could get it right; I braced myself for what would surely be a CD by Enya or Enigma. She returned and placed in my hand *Absent Friends* by The Divine Comedy. I must admit I was genuinely surprised; the cover features none other than a melancholy-looking Neil Hannon, posing on a tattered divan. As I had heard him singing on several Yann Tiersen's songs, I have always wondered about his solo material, and here it was. Although there was indeed a possibility that I might have liked it, I in fact did not. `jp align="left`

§ **June 10.** In my office this morning I saw a little brown spider in the corner of my cubicle by the floor. I tried to scoop him up with a piece of paper, but he resisted; but presently I had him on my desk so I could get a better look at him. I thought I had been gentle, but he remained hunched and didn't move. I put him back in the corner but he still didn't move. I was somewhat relieved when later he was nowhere to be seen.

Later, on the Bay Bridge I was in the far left lane when I beheld a lame seagull, quacking miserably with one wing waving in the air. The lanes are narrow and I almost hit him. In the rear view mirror I could still see him waddling along against the curb, cars whizzing by him a feather's width away. There was nothing I nor anyone else could do to save him from his inevitable fate of being run over. I didn't tell Lucie about him nor the spider because she would have been too upset. I tell myself the spider is alright, but the seagull haunts me.

After returning home from dropping Lucie off at the studio, Mother called to tell me Paul got the librarian job and that he and Sarah are having a baby. My instinct is to pity them, but I know Sarah *wants* a baby, and my brother is so happy-go-lucky, I'm sure he will adjust very well. Father, of course, must be jumping for joy.

§ **June 11.** I had a disturbing dream about a fox which had found its way into our house; he was shaking with fear and snarling. When I tried to coax him from his hiding place in the wardrobe, he jumped onto my shoulders. I shrieked hysterically while the fox bit my ear and dug his claws into my shoulder. At last he jumped escaped through the window. Last night Lucie and I watched the film *Iris*, about the writer Iris Murdoch. In it there is a scene in which Iris is sitting at her typewriter when she hears a disturbance below her window; her cat is fighting with a fox. Naturally, she panicked as

would I have done. If I hadn't dreamed about this, I might have dreamed about the spider or the seagull. Why am I so sensitive about animals? I can never watch nature programs because inevitably the baby elephant is attacked by lions, or some other hunted little animal is devoured by a drooling mouthful of fangs. Of course, it's nature's way. But the one characteristic which distinguishes us from other animals is perhaps our occasional ability to deny our instincts. When a mountain lion wandered into a Palo Alto neighborhood last week and was shot by the authorities, I was outraged at this senseless and unnecessary act. But is it right for me to condemn those who cannot control their instincts, in this case that of self defense? When I look out my window and regard the ape-like behavior of my neighbors I feel I must forgive them; alas, I cannot, for my regard for other creatures, which I cannot help and which to me seems instinctual, is greater than that for my fellow man. How can one explain our great differences? Could there be more than one species of man? Dangerous thoughts, I know, but sometimes I feel there must be.

Dudley: Mohammed Mohammed?

Bubba: Yep, got turned away. He's on the hit list.

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Bubba: I caught her sneaking into my apartment. I was at the donut shop and I seen her walking up and down the street. I figure she seen me. She walked into my building and when she didn't come back out I knew she was up to something. Later, I saw somebody has broken into my neighbor's mailbox. I don't know if she did it or not. Nobody better break into mine, because I'm waiting for my license. If they get *that* then I'm in a world of shit.

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Dudley: It's that time we get a lot of funerals. They have their holidays then they glutton out. They get strokes.

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Bubba: You press "popcorn" on the microwave. Does your microwave say "popcorn"?

Dudley: I don't know if it does. Maybe it does.

Bubba: You press "popcorn" then wait a minute twenty seconds. You press "popcorn".

Dudley: *Popcorn.*

Bubba: Yep, popcorn. For a minute twenty.

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Bubba: I go to Artichoke Joe's. I don't gamble, I just sit there and get the scoops. My sister done real well at the Indian casinos, she says, "I done real well, I done *real well*." Artichoke Joe's, their food is excellent, I mean, it's really fine. They got the best food. I don't gamble, but I like to eat there now and then, the food's excellent.

Dudley: It's like reading the articles in *Playboy*.

Bubba: Yeah, it's like reading the articles in *Playboy*!

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Bubba: It's a Buddhist farm. On the other side it's an organic Buddhist temple.

Dudley: Is that where Gore went?

Bubba: Yeah. It's a good place to dry out, if you was an alcoholic. I'd go there if I was an alcoholic.

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Bubba: He's a Elk. He wants a million dollars for the place, a million in cash. He raised his whole family there, his kids, his grandkids, the whole bunch. He's got a hardware store. I take anything I want from it and he doesn't say anything. He goes fishing with me.

Dudley: [something unintelligible]

Bubba: Naw, that's Indian land. You can't fish on it. `jp align="left` I don't think I can use any of this in my novel. Maybe my next novel, at least that one takes place in America. I can't imagine the above conversations uttered by anybody in France.

**§ September 23.** I was awakened at 4:14 a.m. by the sound of bottles being tossed into a shopping cart. I imagined the dozens of would-be dreamers indulging this woman's selfish groveling because they don't want to get involved, or perhaps because she's less fortunate than they. I would *not* indulge her, and forthwith dumped a glass of water on her head, it rained down on her from nine stories. She didn't look up; she knew what the tiny cloudburst meant. She wiped her face on her sleeve, then continued her task with renewed determination. I readied another glass of water but by the time I returned to the window she was pushing her shopping cart down the

sidewalk. Out of spite, I flung the water at her anyway, which splashed upon her heels. I felt like a scoundrel, but a man needs his beauty sleep!

§ **September 24.** I am distracted by nearly everything – distant music, an idling motorcycle, a child’s whine, something rattling in the breeze. I predict these intrusions and use them as an excuse not to write. Instead, I flip channels, or try to read, but reading can often be as difficult as writing. How many books I started and not finished this year! I talk about resuming *Ulysses* the way one talks about getting around to clean out the attic. What a lazy sod am I. In my defense, the move upstairs has been such a chore, a chore which never seems to end. To write down here about today’s latest project would be too dull.

§ **October 14.** Lucie and I tend to spend money whenever we have it, although our extravagances, when they are not foodstuffs or meals at a restaurant, are limited to things which make our apartment beautiful—chiefly objets d’art, candles, flowers, and of course, books. Today our purchases included two antique wooden hands (we have a small collection of them) and a curious miniature stage from Italy depicting a sinister character in a red cape. We have turned our tiny studio into, to use an apt cliché, a jewel box. For we spend much of our time at home, together with our cats or entertaining close friends. Many would regard our abode with ridicule, baffled by our decadent, arcane tastes which are quite at odds with the mainstream; absent is the giant-screen television, granite counter tops, the stainless steel appliances which are so dear to the modern set. How I adore it here, where one is scarcely aware of the ugliness in the world without.

This ugliness, however, made itself evident yesterday when I rushed to the window in response to a commotion. I beheld nine stories below a man lying face down in the middle of the street, his assailant showering him with brutal punches and shouted oaths. I gave my account of the sickening scene to the police, but remained disturbed for the rest of the day—how I abhor violence.

The homemade potato leek soup is almost ready, so I must set this journal aside and set the table for dinner.

§ **October 15.** . A farewell luncheon for Randolphe, accompanied by Lucie and Chimes. Randolphe chose sushi, which is all he ever eats, so

the four of us rode in our car to Randolphe's favourite haunt a few blocks from the office. Despite his affability and love of a good time, and especially our many years as colleagues, I must say I am happy to see Randolphe leave. Having formed with him the kind of friendship one forms in an otherwise hostile working environment, I found myself always sitting next to him at meetings, chatting by the water cooler, and even sitting in his office for hours at a time in conversation more damaging to my spirit than if I had spent it at the mall; what dull times we had! I blame myself for encouraging our relationship, for not making excuses soon enough or frequently enough, for not having the determination to avoid him, for Randolphe is neither intellectual nor artistic, preferring his beloved motorcycles to poetry. Before our luncheon together, I spent the morning in his office while he demonstrated the various "ringtones" on his portable telephone (how my ears hurt!), showed me endless photographs of his new house in Orlando, and spoke excitedly of his new life while I not only feigned interest but foolishly encouraged the conversation with enthusiastic exclamations and questions. I will certainly not miss his frequent conference calls (his booming voice penetrates the thin wall between our offices as a wrecking ball would), his door slamming, and his way of laughing at his own jokes. I feel like such a bastard; may he be my last *faux ami*.

§ **October 17.** . Anaïs Nin was distressed and discouraged because she knew her work was good, and couldn't understand why it didn't sell. Andrew's work doesn't sell in general, and like Nin, wonders why. Both writers are, in my opinion, highly distinctive, possessing qualities of idiosyncrasy and eccentricity that I value above all else in art. Because their work is so different than that of the writers *du jour*, they tend to be overlooked, underappreciated, and misunderstood by all but a handful.

A book deal, however, has its appeal—I have often dreamt of a slim volume of decadent verse, bound in red morocco with my name on the spine in gilt, nestled between Baudelaire and Dowson in my bookcase; it can also bring one rapt admiration from complete strangers, much applause, acclaim, and pats on the back, not to mention prizes and awards, most of dubious merit. Shadowy figures on the lawn. Rabid autograph seekers. The telephone ringing at all hours. Lucrative engagements in respectable venues. Will one be the next Dave Eggers, or David Sedaris, public figures whose persona, nay, their mere *names*, outshine their work? Their gifts to the world await one's discovery in the windows of every bookstore on the planet. But for every

eponymous or otherwise conspicuous breathtaking work of staggering genius, the sheer quantity of which is staggering, there are other geniuses lurking in cafés, garrets, and gutters, known only to a few, their works distributed privately, intimately, untouched by enemies of art. The mere thought of it makes me anxious perhaps beyond reason. Nin craved not celebrity or riches, but understanding, and she found it long before Harcourt Brace Jovanovich raised its holy sceptre and tapped her on the head late in her life, merely by sharing her diaries with the other creative people close to her. Did she really need the thousands of additional adoring fans she would later acquire?

Not that the good people of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich would ever give me the time of day, even after my death, I find some satisfaction knowing that I can put anything I write online, letting people find it as they may. Occasionally someone sends a kind word my way, but what I thrive on is the criticism, the insults, the jabs, pokes, and stones hurled my way; it reinforces my world view, that I am a rarity among the mob, I'm different, *unique*.

If I weren't so concerned with my own writing, I would attempt to start my own literary magazine in which I would publish the work of Andrew, myself (how convenient) and my peers, what few there are. This confluence of like minds might attract others like us; I know they must exist, but the trick is in the finding. We won't find each other among the pages of *Harper's*, in writing seminars, at poetry slams, nor even the nearest café (unless by incredible good fortune; the cafés in my town are generally bereft of art); there are too few of us to meet by chance, hence the virtues of the internet. I regard with envy the days of Zola and his coterie at Médan, the literary salon of Stein in Paris, or the knights of the Algonquin Round Table. Something was in the air then, a fresh gust which bore with it a new literature; this air is now stale and heavy with the stench of posers, hacks, and moneygrubbers. Literature is choking! *Au secours! The few of us, clinging to our lifeboat in enemy waters, no land in sight except that of our imaginations...* Oh, how I can ramble.

§ **October 18.** The rainy season arrives just in time to soothe my aching spirit—how I adore a day dark with heavy, brooding clouds and a chill in the air. I took a long, leisurely luncheon at my favorite table at a favourite Chinese restaurant; I continued reading Nin's early diaries and taking notes, occasionally looking out the window to watch the branches of nearby trees sway wildly in the wind. My thoughts were often interrupted, however, by two gentlemen who spoke of nothing but sports in the loudest possible voices;

football statistics threaded their way through Nin's charming phrases, nearly spoiling them.

Nin remarks upon the "tremendous, immeasurable importance" of *transition* to her. Since she is an immeasurably important influence to me at the moment, I should give *transition* another chance; I had misunderstood its writers before, often regarding them as charlatans, but I am now turning towards the early modernists, whose work I have shunned until only very recently when I discovered for the first time Joyce, Proust, and Kafka after being bogged down for so many years in 19th-c. French literature (but of which I am still immensely fond). What the modernists faced at the turn of the 20th century we are facing now at the beginning of this one, with the additional concern of being heard over the infernal din of today's abundant literature which threatens the world's forests with extinction.

I am still embarrassed to show my novel to Andrew, whose opinion means everything to me. He has for so long put up with my whining, pontificating, and procrastinating, who alone knows what I am capable of (besides Lucie, who has read my manuscript several times already), and now that I have written 11,000 words I feel like it's time to lay my cards upon the table or quit the game. But I lately am flooded with new ideas of how to save the mess I have written thus far; if I may put it off for another few weeks...

§ **October 19.** . Lucie and I slept in. The storm has so far been a disappointment, although it is much cooler now. Much to my chagrin, Chimes wrote to invite us to a farewell dinner for Randolphe on Wednesday. When I responded that we were busy, he asked, "How about Thursday?" I agreed, only because it will positively be the last time and besides, it is potential *grist for the mill*, as Dorothy Parker says.

§ **October 21.** . The dreaded meal. The grist was there, but I am not up to the milling. For the sake of Randolphe, I faked a good time but privately was bored and unhappy at having wasted an evening of precious life. Lingering good-byes on the street, hugs, good lucks, &c. Let this be a lesson to me.

§ **October 23.** . An ugly incident with a neighbor. I had noticed odours, noise, and so forth on our floor, which seemed to be coming from an apartment down the hall whose door is frequently open. Behind it, always



a bubbling pot of something on the stove, or the heavy pounding of cleavers on the chopping block. I complained to Mrs. Gifford several times, to no avail. At last, the neighbor, a mustachioed Chinese woman, knocked on our door. *How long you spy on me? My open door is none of your business! What did I ever do to you, etc.* I explained that her position was indefensible from the point of view of the homeowner's association, but as far as I was concerned, it was the very *idea* of her door being open which I found offensive. This latter point I could not get her to understand. The conflict ended with tears and feet stamping on her part, an exaggerated shrug on mine. I lay awake that night counting my reasons for being right, but still shaken at being cried at, shouted at, even told to "shut up". She had jabbed her finger in the air and shrieked, "You better watch out!" Apparently, she has lived her open-door lifestyle unimpeded for thirteen years, and I am the only one to have ever complained. I'm *always* the only one who complains.

§ **October 31.** . Lucie and I drove up the coast to our usual hideout; as the last time, I had the gripe, which limited our activities to lying around, reading, and looking out the window. This morning, we watched as a river otter on several occasions approached a pod of pelicans; we assumed he was playing until to our amazement he seized one in its jaws and swam upriver with it.

Despite my illness, I relished the rare opportunity to escape the noise of the city—no car horns or alarms, fire truck sirens, roaring buses, rap music, shouted oaths, trombone blasts, or hammering. These sounds were replaced by those of crashing waves, wind, seagulls, and little else. However, so sensitive am I to my environment, I admit to being annoyed by the most innocuous of noises—the tapping sounds made by the ugly plastic framed posters over the bed (caused by changes in air pressure), the bubbling of mineral water in a nearby glass, the flapping of pelicans' wings in the river. In a sensory deprivation tank, I would undoubtedly complain of the din of my own breathing, the creak of my joints, my beating heart.

§ **November 3.** . Another ridiculous presidential election with ridiculous candidates. People carrying on as if it mattered who won. Once again, Lucie and I must conceal our choice from our gay friends, our conservative parents, and anyone else we encounter (hint: he isn't even mentioned in most election results). However, we did watch the returns on the Fox network, although I found the chaotic, swirling graphics, typographical errors, and

linguistic atrocities quiet tiresome on the eye and ear. Meanwhile, I have jury duty next week. If only they knew beforehand I was an atheist, they could save us both some trouble. I'll not be swearing on any holy bibles! The courthouse is in such a savage neighborhood, and there is nowhere to eat nearby except a McDonald's, which I wouldn't set foot in if I were starving. I will have to pack a luncheon. But is wine allowed in the courthouse?

§ **November 6.** . The library, of all places, has become a chamber of tortures to me. A woman in the hall ignored my repeated requests to keep her coarse, barnyard voice down, even after I at last taped a sign in front of her hatchet face which read, "Please keep your voice down." She acted as if I were invisible, while I pondered whether I had the authority to eject her from the premises. There was the altercation between Linda and a homeless woman, the trouble with the juvenile delinquents sentenced to community service—what a mess they made of the biography section!—and the birthday party downstairs. The din began almost as soon as I had unlocked the building. The group had brought along a karaoke machine and connected it to a public address system. We were against our wishes treated to a concert of tuba-heavy Latino music; the floor throbbed, the walls shook, and my ears hurt. Lucie, who often accompanies me on Sundays, fled the premises. When I explained to the mob that the library was upstairs, they laughed. I asked them to turn the music down twice more, but as the afternoon wore on the volume only increased, but ceased altogether after I called the police, who arrived fifteen minutes before the library closed. By the time we left, my nerves were positively shattered. So much for a peaceful afternoon at the reference desk, where I had hoped to read and perhaps write a little.

§ **November 9.** Lingering illness has limited my activities; I don't feel like doing much of anything, writing included, although Lucie and I have been watching a lot of films, lately those of various Czech directors. I find their unpronounceable names appealing—how I wish I had an unpronounceable name! At least an unpronounceable pseudonym would be a gesture which would serve to distance myself further from American society which I find so lacking in intellect. Its use in everyday life would even discourage salesmen from calling me on the telephone, *Hello, Mr., uhh...*[click]. I scoured the telephone book for a suitable one, but nothing seems quite right. First of all, apart from a French great-grandfather, my family is American since the days of the Revolution; all the names on my family tree are

of the utmost prosiness—Miller, Lamb, Johnson, Campbell—even my great-grandfather’s name was the uninspiring Arnold, shortened from Arnoldi. If one but tickled my fancy I could use it with some justification. One way, however, I could acquire a name I could lay claim to as my own is to make up one, preferably one with lots of diacritics and intimidating consonantal clusters, such as rbyczký. Besides my mastering another language, which is unlikely to ever happen, a name like rbyczký would be the last detail in alienating myself completely from other Americans.

Of course, being an American has little to do with my alienation, as I am seemingly at odds with all of mankind. I would be just as much the outsider, for example, if I were to move to Malta or the Netherlands. But being an American carries for me a particularly troublesome stigma, especially now, when the political, cultural, and social climate is as inhospitable as it has ever been to persons of sensitivity, manners, and élan. I must remind myself it could always be worse, but being this alienated, I feel my very identity is at stake. Who am I, really? If I found I was not *Homo sapiens* but rather a hitherto undiscovered species, that might offer me some comfort, or would it?

§ **November 12.** . To my relief, I wasn’t called once for jury duty. I recall with distaste the people one has to mingle with, it’s how I imagine Wal-Mart must be. At any rate, I believe juries should be comprised of educated people, a type of meritocratic system. One of my worst nightmares is to be tried by a jury of my “peers”—people who cannot tell right from wrong themselves nor who can even form or understand a simple logical argument—then tossed into a gaol within which who knows what horrors await the misanthropic poet. Should I ever find myself behind bars, I would not hesitate to take whatever means necessary to escape short of killing someone. I have oft wondered how I would manage life on the lam, especially where the particulars of identification, papers, and other legal documentation are concerned. My false passport, for example, is only symbolic and would never fool the authorities. Thus would probably begin a veritable life of crime, for Lucie, too, for we could never be separated; besides, she has proven a formidable accomplice in the past. I should like to explore the idea in novel form—place my character in such a situation and see where it leads... Of course, I’ve another novel collecting dust for weeks now—what shall I do about it?

Lucie and I all of a sudden feel like playing Scrabble, but we don’t own

the game. Eager to support a local business while continuing to snub the national chains, we went to Jeffrey's on Market Street. To my astonishment, the deluxe set cost \$54! Against my better judgment, I was obliged to purchase it from Amazon for less than half that sum. Alas, am I not man enough to put my money where my mouth is?

My new *nom de plume* is Vodrázka, a somewhat uncommon Czech name chosen not for its difficulty to pronounce but rather for its euphony, although it is sufficiently "foreign" to discourage a typical American.

§ **November 14.** . After another busy day behind the reference desk—I can attest that there is indeed such a thing as a stupid question and that I have heard them all—I dropped Lucie off at home then headed down the coast. The drive was unpleasant, as there was much traffic. Where were all those people going on a Sunday evening? I drove in the slow lane while listening to plainchant, but alas, it was not enough to calm my nerves shattered by aggressive and impatient drivers flashing their headlights and swerving all about me. I imagined vague misfortunes involving assassins, rogues, thieves, our car in flames in an abyss, my luggage dashed to bits on the rocks, my viscera spilling onto the soil.

At the Portola Plaza Hotel. My room decorated in a surprisingly tasteful, if conventional style. I opened the window for a breath of sea air but closed it at once to quell the din of trucks and sea lions which I found distracting. I called Lucie—*Hi, it's me I'm in room 334 call me back click*—then dined downstairs on crab cakes and prime rib. The restaurant was empty but for a table of librarians, each wearing a name tag, talking animatedly about library-related topics. Back in my room, I watched a program on Henry VIII then read a little of Jean Rhys before turning out the lights at ten o'clock. I had hoped to get some writing done, but when I travel I cannot usually concentrate on much of anything, always troubled by an indefinable fear, as if I were cast adrift in an endless sea to an unknown but certain peril.

§ **November 15.** . Up at seven o'clock. A shower and a shave, then downstairs to the exhibit hall. My name is misspelled on my badge. The materials had not yet arrived to our booth, so I loitered about the wharf, reading historical plaques. I sat on a dewy bench, soaking the seat of my trousers. Bicyclists, joggers, and bums about. Sea lions barking their heads off, the gentle lap of waves. I rescued a doomed slug which had oozed its way

into a dry cul-de-sac, then climbed over a rock to study a tide pool, but it was empty.

I had a meeting at eleven with one Mike Crawford, so after wandering around downtown studying the architecture, I sat in the hotel lobby to read and watch people. Light jazz piped from a hidden multitude of speakers; must there always be music everywhere, all the time? One really can't escape it. Besides the typical attire of librarians which has almost become a uniform, I observed on this cool morning several men in baggy shorts and t-shirts while another wore an oversized, fur-lined parka. I expected to overhear at any minute the gentleman speaking one of the Saami languages, but I spied him later reading *The Da Vinci Code*, perhaps a Saami edition. After my meeting, I took my luncheon at a nearby Indian buffet.

Later. A tiresome afternoon in the booth with Mr. Jenkins and Mike, in the presence of which I was obliged to be particularly professional in my presentations. The situation called for me to behave in a manner completely against my nature—one must greet strangers with a smile and speak authoritatively on matters technological, essentially playing the salesman. Oh, why did I ever agree to do this? Most tiresome of all were those who wished to simply stand around and chat about software. *I'm sorry I don't know what that is, I'm merely filling in for a colleague who has left the company.* When an *ad hoc* cocktail bar appeared nearby, our booth was mobbed when a long queue formed; soon I was rather hoarse. I overheard Mr. Jenkins and Mike discussing dinner plans; I pretended not to hear but Mr. Jenkins then asked if I might join them. If I declined the invitation, he might feel snubbed; if I accepted, might I be in the way as they spoke of business?

As it turned out, Mike's wife joined us, so the dinner was more casual in nature. We went to an expensive restaurant on Cannery Row which was really quite excellent. I consumed my salad, polenta, and mahi mahi steak with enthusiasm while the others talked about baseball players' salaries, blockbuster movies (Mike's wife recounted a dozen scenes from the preposterous-sounding *National Treasure*—would that I had a tape recording of her on those sleepless nights!), and the weather; whenever possible, I exercised my wit, drawing a laugh or two, but whenever I attempted direct conversation with one person in particular, it ended almost as soon as it began, our voices trailing off awkwardly. After faking my existence the entire day, I returned to my room and collapsed, utterly exhausted.

§ **November 16.** . I have an unexplained pain in my left shoulder. With the dynamic duo absent much of the day, I was able to fairly relax. The booth was less busy, and I found the time on occasion to write some letters. With an expense account, I could have had dinner anywhere in town, but I was so fatigued I could only summon the strength to have a disgusting pizza delivered to my room from Round Table. It seems I didn't learn my lesson the first time! I even lacked the desire to read, or write in my journal; I watched the television all evening, simply amazed at the excruciating quality of popular shows. Why, their brains must be rotten through. After I turned out the lights at one o'clock, I worried about the wounds my intellect must have suffered after witnessing so many advertisements, and for such dubious products! How fortunate am I to be immune to it all. However, should I ever be forced to watch "The Friends", or "Wife Swappers", or "The American Idols", I might be obliged to gouge out my eyes in self-defence.

§ **November 17.** . Mr. Jenkins left last night, so I arrived at the booth late. The materials had at last arrived, but I left them in their cartons—who would find out? Throughout the day I feared Mike might appear and see I had neglected my duties, but apparently he had left, too. I located an uncomfortable stool and began reading Jean Rhys' *Quartet*, the perfect antidote to last night's televised poisons, taking occasional breaks to write in my journal. At 3:30, as soon as the exhibit hall was closed, I was ready to go, and was soon cruising along Highway 1. Two hours later I was in Lucie's arms, alive once again. I will never, ever volunteer to work in the booth again. I can never regain those precious lost hours, and how much room the recounting of it has taken in my journal!

§ **November 18.** . After sleeping late, Lucie and I spent the day reading, answering correspondence, and doing chores. In contrast to the previous days' events, I found joy in every simple task, from making the beds to feeding the cats. Ah, home, my inner sanctum, my refuge. At dusk we met Kenneth, Phillip, and Chimes at the Schnitzlehaus. Kenneth was in a mood, complaining about his mother's bad behaviour to him, but we managed to cheer him up in time for the Hypnodrome. We arrived late, during the harmonium overture, barely in time to take our seats before the curtain rose. We were shown three Grand Guignol dramas, performed with much polish, wit, and charm. "The Beast" was a gothic yarn of a family's dark secret, first performed in 1928; "Bearded Assets" was the comic tale of the illicit affair

between a carnival's bearded lady and a mute ticket taker; "Murder of the Will" was a story of hypnotism and unrequited love culminating in a tragic and sensational ending during which the theatre was plunged into darkness and the audience threatened by swirling phantasms, hair-raising screams, and macabre organ music. My seat was rigged with a vibrating buzzer which was activated during moments of high drama. We left in high spirits, each of us thrilled by the discovery of this ripping new venue. I shall look forward with impatience to their next production. On our way to our cars, we lingered outside a bakery which sells naughty cakes and talked animatedly for another half hour before parting ways. The fog was thick on this night; Lucie and I drove to Fort Point and then to China Beach to listen to the fog horns until we were chased away by the appearance of a sinister-looking van. Home, then to bed at one o'clock.

§ **November 19.** . Lucie and I are married ten years to-day. We slept late, then played Scrabble (French words allowed) and watched films all day, including von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express* and the silent *Die freudlose Gasse*. Too poor to dine out, the evening we spent in each other's arms, drinking absinthe and listening to '20s jazz. I feel so fortunate to have met Lucie, who understands me, indulges my sensitive nature, encourages my idiosyncracies, and shares my ideals. Without her, I fear I might go mad, or end up a bitter, old curmudgeon.

§ **November 20.** . A late breakfast of tea and clementines. We watched Lousie Brooks in *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* and vankmajer's *Neco z Alenky*. It seems we spend more time consuming art than creating it. But without these films, and music, literature, &c. to nourish my spirit, I might lack the inspiration to create, for my greatest act of creation is to imbue the artistic impulse into everything I say, think, and do. In the absence of art, I would cease to live.

§ **November 22.** . The grim reality of paid employment, as Lucie and I returned to the office for the first time in a week. After taping pieces of cardboard over my office's south window to block out the punishing sunlight, I spent the morning filling out an expense report for my trip to Monterey, then fussing with my computer to get Outlook working again, as the mail server was moved over the weekend. *How dull is that last sentence!* Oh, if

only I were a rich man. When I think of the hours, nay, the years spent behind this desk, I want to hurl my chair through the window. I mustn't forget how easy my current job is, compared to those of others who dig ditches or serve hamburgers. How I regard my colleagues with wonder who speak of their careers, who take their duties seriously and even claim to *love* their jobs. If I had a job doing something I loved to do, for example, reading slim volumes of decadent poetry, would being paid for it take the pleasure out of it?

§ **November 25.** . I kept Lucie company in the kitchen this morning as she prepared for us a small feast. O'Farrell Street was dotted with people carrying platters covered in tin foil, or pies. I witnessed an accident at the intersection whereby several people's holiday was ruined, *tant pis*. If they weren't in such a damned hurry. After dining, Lucie and I took the car to Land's End for a walk; as it was foggy, drizzly, and gray, we counted on having the place all to ourselves but to our dismay there were scores of families about, squealing children, excitable dogs, joggers, and perverts. For a time Lucie and I were jostled about, always in someone's way or someone was in our way on the narrow trails. As the afternoon gave way to the gloaming, however, we found ourselves alone on the rocks, gazing out to sea as the moon rose behind us. I examined a tide pool teeming with starfish, sea anemones and mussels. On our way back to the car we passed an eccentric-looking woman on an old bicycle headed toward Painted Rock; how could she see in this darkness and fog? Would she jump, her body dashed to bits on the rocks below? On our way home, we passed the Balboa Theater just so we could admire its wonderful neon; each letter lighting up after the other, *B, A, L, B, O, A*, before flashing again in unison. I've seen three such theaters torn down in our own neighborhood in the last few years, each replaced by a frat boy developer's attempt at a quick, sloppy buck. We then searched for a café on McAllister Street which Lucie had heard about, only to find it under new management, whatever allure it may have had now ruined. We spent our evening playing Scrabble and listening to the modern composers, Schoenberg, Lutosawski, *et al.* I find I don't hate *everything* about modernism. Lucie disappeared into the boudoir and emerged with dramatically kohled eyes; I tried to convince her to go to the office that way, but we both know she would be ridiculed, "Hallowe'en was last month!" or "You look like a raccoon!" A ravishing beauty like Lucie made fun of so, why, it makes me want to lash out at such imbeciles, to protect her. A cane whipping, that's what they deserve.



§ **November 26.** . This morning I hung coloured lights in the windows, the large tear-shaped bulbs I remember from my youth—I can’t believe they are still manufactured. Lucie and I took a stroll down to Union Square to watch the masses. I am not a skilled enough writer to describe what we saw, or perhaps I am too lazy. I’ve an appetite, that’s what it is. Lucie is chopping onions and we are both crying, although the cats seem unaffected.

I admired a corduroy suit in the window of Cable Car Clothiers, similar to the one I ruined in Paris when I spilled a pot of *moutarde* on it. To my surprise and delight, this purveyor of bespoke menswear sells *foulards*, for which I have hitherto searched in vain; they are even in my preferred style. My clothes and especially my shoes are so shabby now. Alas, I cannot afford a pair of argyle socks at present, so penniless are we. Of course it doesn’t help that property taxes are due on the 10th. I need to find an additional source of income to replace that lost by my temporary position at the university. This evening I looked through the classified advertisements for part-time positions but nothing appealed to me; for example, a “Web Coordinator”—what could that possibly mean? A senior tax consultant sounds too dull, and a softball coach is obviously out of the question. I would be most comfortable at a position which required little or no work at all, say, as a guard at a museum, *Don’t touch that, Madam*; or perhaps as a painter of aristocrats’ portraits (alas, I can’t paint). I might like Anaïs Nin pretend to be a psychiatrist, but that requires an office. The best I may hope for, however, is a position as an English tutor.

Mr. Ffolliot has again from the generosity of his own pockets purchased art for the building’s lobby, this time statues of David and Venus. Given the anatomical correctness of the David, I expect an uproar from the same folks who protested over the copy of Lempicka’s *Adam and Eve* earlier this year. I will not be surprised the next time I see the David it is been given adorned with a pair of boxer shorts. What absurd times!

§ **November 27.** . I find I am most comfortable when it is in the 30s or 40s; I can wear what I wish, including hat, gloves, scarf, things I must leave at home when it is too warm. Lucie and I took the car to Berkeley. We went window shopping for a light fixture for the kitchen; upon our appearance, one of the sales girls exclaimed, “Are you *going* somewhere?” She was presumably impressed with our attire. Lucie lied and said we were not, however, can’t one dress well for no reason at all other than our own pleasure? To Lacis for lace and feathers for Lucie’s hats, where a clerk referred

to me to her colleague as, “That *guy*”, as in, “That guy is looking for men’s handkerchiefs.” We met Carmella and Felix at Bucci’s to celebrate Felix’s birthday. Felix has gained much weight since we last saw him and throughout the meal he perspired profusely. His still has a pill-popping attitude towards health which is encouraged by Carmella’s hypochondriasis, her health actually made worse by her consumption of snake oil. One can’t say anything, really, for fear of a scene, as Carmella’s are legendary. She’s been accepted to some sort of writing seminar this winter, where she doubtless expects to cozy up to Rick Moody who will make her rich and famous. Indeed, Carmella is consumed with ambition while her work takes the back seat always. At 44, I don’t see how she’s going to suddenly make a living as a writer when she has only just begun to write and demonstrates no particular talent for it. She is, however, a fine painter; when she didn’t become rich and famous doing that she stopped. Lucie and I have encouraged her to no avail.

Wow! When I sat down to my journal to-day I certainly didn’t intend to write so much about Carmella. What if Baudelaire, in a bid for fame in his own lifetime, had kissed every ass in Paris? He kissed one or two, to be sure, but how would celebrity have affected his writing? Would he have left behind a *Spleen de Paris*, a *Les Fleurs du mal*? Carmella needs a position, then she wouldn’t have to worry about supporting herself with her work, which she, like Baudelaire, has never been successful at doing.

§ **November 29.** . I still abhor confrontation, but I have learned these last few years to say, “No” when it needs to be said. At the library to-day, I shut the window because of a barking dog and because it was cold. A familiar and troublesome homeless woman approached my desk to complain.

“Why did you close the window? There’s no *air* in here.”

“On the *contrary*, Madame,” I replied, without looking up from my papers.

“But we *always* have the window open,” she whined.

“I wish it closed.”

“Do you make the rules?”

“Yes, and I do not wish to discuss it further.”

“But...”

“Tut, tut, tut.” I raised my hand in a gesture of silence.

“But...”

“No.”

She at last stomped away in indignation. To my horror, a library patron approached and complemented my performance, for performance it was, entertainment for all within earshot. I found his encouragement as distasteful as the confrontation itself; if I could somehow erase the unpleasant scene from my memory, how I would do so!

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§ **December 5.** . Here am I at the library again, resplendent in my new wingtip boots purchased on credit. No annoying people are about, and I rest undisturbed behind my desk, answering correspondence and reading decadent poetry. Before the building opened, I sat in the park to watch the children play. How I abhor children. A little blond-haired brat with a penchant for shouting instead of speaking surprised me when he suddenly blurted out to no one in particular, “J’ai finis!” before placing his arm across his forehead and collapsing in the sand. I couldn’t help myself, and asked, “Excuse me, young man, but did you say, ‘J’ai finis!’?” He opened one eye and responded in the affirmative. But where did he learn it? “Il faut dire, ‘Je suis finis’.”

Despite our diminishing resources, Lucie has bought for me last week the aforementioned boots in brown, a pair of pointy black lace-up Paolo shoes, a black wool three-button suit, an astonishing Prada necktie, a shirt, monogrammed handkerchiefs, delicate socks, and what else? For I have neglected my wardrobe of late, so dear is it to be a dandy. For a dandy I am, albeit on a shoestring, for only last night was I humbled by the presence of a dandy of no little magnificence, strolling down Powell Street in a full-length mink coat. I did not permit myself to stare, but continued walking, wondering who he was and from whence he came. For dandies in modern American society are conspicuous by their mere existence. But there must be more of them, for how else can Cable Car Clothiers stay in business for all these years?

On Wednesday, Mr. Jenkins made a surprise appearance at the office. Had I been forewarned I would probably have removed my false moustache and beard; fortunately he only laughed at me and asked why I was wearing them. I was evasive in my answer, and the conversation turned to matters more alarming when he asked me, “Did you set up the booth on Wednesday?”

referring to last Wednesday, of course. Was he asking me because he knew I did not, or simply because it was only natural to ask given the circumstances? “Yes,” I lied. It seems I have gotten away with it, to my great relief. However, so impressed was he of my performance, he has asked me to help him in the booth at the ALA Midwinter meeting next month, thus sabotaging my opportunity to explore Boston on foot much of the time. With his presence, I will be obliged to keep him abreast of my activities, at least during business hours. Drat!

Last night at 10:30 came a faint knock at our door. Through the peep hole I beheld a young woman dressed in the manner of the punk rockers, her face riddled with primitive piercings, her hair dyed the requisite green, carrying an enormous, ratty knapsack. “Yes?” I queried wearily through the door. Her reply was mumbled, so I opened the door, leaving the chain engaged. She held her hand to her ear in a telephone symbol and asked, “Do you have a phone I can use?” She appeared to be trembling. When I declined her request, she disappeared down the hall. Who was this ragamuffin, knocking us up at random thus? I had half a mind to summon the doorman, but in the end I did not. In retrospect, I always wish I had done something other than what I did do, or said what I did not. My staircase wit never fails, alas, the rest does.

§ **December 6.** . Here am I, talking about Saturday. I must keep up with my journal! Saturday Lucie and I took a walk to Hayes Valley to pick up my black shoes from Paolo. A middling luncheon of cheesesteaks at an establishment advertising its “family atmosphere” in the window; inside, the patronne, a matronly woman wider than she was tall, barking orders to her son, a pierced and tattoo’d dullard in a t-shirt which read, “People = Shit”. I’ll bet Mama cries herself to sleep each night. When I asked her for a fork, she looked across the room at our table, then looked me up and down. Deciding we were worthy of a fork, she replied, “I give you fork.” On the way home, we stopped in Dark Garden to look at corsets, then we dropped off my shoes at Francisco’s. Once again we found him sitting in his shop, silent, motionless, without a book, radio or television to keep him company, not even a lowly *People* magazine. Lucie and I try to chat with him; he gradually becomes more animated and even smiles, but I fear the poor chap’s depressed. He tells us he has been there for forty years. *Business is no good*, he adds, in his thick Argentine accent. *Now people throw away their shoes*. After we left, Lucie explained to me that his name isn’t even

Francisco; Francisco is the name of his late partner. But we've been calling him Francisco all this time and he hasn't said anything!

Last night, after I returned home from the library, Lucie and I went downstairs to the Christmas party. Conspicuously absent were old Mr. Ffoliot, Veronica the tiny whore, Stompy, that Vietnamese opera lady, Alex on the second floor who collects old Hollywood memorabilia, and Helen who moved into our old digs. But Patrick was there, stabbing Gloria with his eyes while patting himself verbally on the back over his patio design, which to these eyes looks like a helicopter landing pad. Lucie and I positioned ourselves at a table on the far side of the lobby, consuming the cheese and wine Sophie had ordered from France; presently, two neighbors joined us, one who liked to talk about his work for some union, the other who was so dull I remember nothing about him except his vague appearance. When James appeared, I sat on the floor next to him and we talked about his plans to move to Berkeley, *Esquire* magazine (he loves it; each time I read it I vow to never read it again), Frank Sinatra (he loves him, although he agreed with me when I said Sinatra was the kind of person to say things to you like, "Isn't it a little *early* for Hallowe'en, kid?" or "Where's the *funeral*, kid?"), and writing (neither of us is getting any work done). Soon, Lucie, who had escaped the union bore, and I were lying prostrate on the carpet; each time an acquaintance of James approached, I shook his hand without getting up, for I had given up on James and the party. We had hoped there would be grist for the mill, but neither of us had the patience to wait for it to happen on its own, nor the inspiration to create our own.

§ **December 7.** . Yesterday evening on the train Lucie was shot at! The bullet hit the window next to her, shattering the outer pane outright, and damaging the interior pane. Lucie was naturally unfazed, but her fellow passengers responded with a similar nonchalance I find puzzling. She saw no conductor until the train arrived to the city; he listened to her account dutifully and said he would file a report. Woe to the would-be assassin, when this report is written and filed!

On the way home from the train depot we stopped by Francisco's to pick up my shoes. On this occasion we found him positively jolly. We learned his name is Ubaldino; Francisco is the name of his predecessor. We spoke for over an hour about Francisco and his untimely death, food, and Argentina. He wanted to play for us a recording of songs from Paraguay, sung in Guaraní, but each song he played turned out to be an instrumental. He kept fast-

forwarding the cassette to no avail. We at last made our excuses but made him promise to find the right music for when we saw him again. Once home we played Scrabble while watching a couple of Buster Keaton films, but I found it rather hard to do both at the same time. To bed at midnight.

Up at noon. Lucie and I spent to-day indulging in the most delicious *flânerie*. I've decided I rather like the Caffé Rulli at Union Square, which is one of the few European-style cafés in the city. It's only flaw is being situated in the dreadful shadow of the St. Francis Hotel. Seated to our right, a couple of Germans engaged in conversation; to our left, a young man in a bowler hat, looking very much like one of Anthony Burgess' *droogs*; I expect him at any moment to jump up and *tolchock* a passing *baboochka*. As he stands to greet his friends, I decide he looks more like Chaplin, but no less threatening. From nearby speakers issues "Here Lies Love", sung in Italian, and in the distance, the sounds of a tuba without accompaniment; it's charming, really, even comical, and a welcome relief from the drone of Christmas carols.

As I finish this entry, the telephone rings. I stare at it suspiciously; usually we let the answering machine shield us from salesmen, bill collectors, and robots, but for some reason I pick up. "Hello," I say, wearily.

"May I speak to Julian?"

I don't recognize the voice, which has just addressed me familiarly. The voice begins to ramble about free tickets to something.

"How appalling! I abhor whatever it is your a trying to give away."

I hear nervous laughter, then the voice says, "But you didn't last year!"

"How dare you, Sir! I demand you not telephone here again. Good-bye." I hung up. I find it preposterous that a strange person could telephone me at random and offer me anything at any price that I would give a damn about.

**§ December 9.** . On TV5 at the moment, Sonia Rykiel, dazzlingly beautiful and intelligent, looking rather like the subject of a painting by Klimt or Khnopff, is showing an interviewer her favourite books; they're talking about Poe, Bataille, Sarraute, and Proust. Now she's rolling about on her divan. I'm slack-jawed, having never seen such a thing on American television.

Lucie got up to do some work while I slept until 1:30. The longer I stay in bed, the longer I wish to remain. It's uncomfortably warm and humid, sixty degrees, but foggy, enough to obscure the monstrous FBI building nearby. I

dusted, cleaned out my closet, and dragged a pile of books downstairs and put them in the trunk of the car. I've been useful! How dull.

§ **December 11.** . I'm fed up with shoddy service, lousy workmanship, low manners, carelessness, knavery, and the foolishness of others when it is at my expense. Averse to confrontation, I have always preferred to say nothing, do nothing, shrug, sigh in resignation, flee, or pretend to be asleep. However, something has changed of late in my character; a switch has been thrown which enables me to put my foot down when it must needs be put down, and to say, "This is an outrage" when it is clearly an outrage. This change has progressed slowly but steadily this last year, and finally acknowledged in a conversation had with Lucie the other day after we returned home from the grocer's to find our purchases tossed into bags as if by an ape; clementines were squashed under cans, berries bruised by melons, a cake badly jostled (and we were overcharged for the cake as well). It is always like this, when we shop at Bell, which we do when we are poor. Since we are increasingly lean of pocket, we stand to shop there more often and thus to have our groceries packed carelessly, unless I do something about it, and I fully intend to. But I must be careful to be a gentleman about it and not a cad, so willing am I to wring necks, kick behinds. *I say, young man, but this simply will not do.*

In the garage we encountered Ford, one of James' friends to whom I was introduced at the Christmas party while I lay prostrate on the carpet. I felt a tinge of embarrassment, but Ford seemingly was not put off by my lack of manners, or he has forgotten all about it. Rather, he appeared eager to talk to us, despite our eccentric appearance and behaviour. He is an affable, intelligent chap about my own age. Lucie and I found him agreeable enough, in fact, we have talked it over and intend to invite him to tea. I do hope he turns out to be artistic, literary, or eccentric, and doesn't want to talk about video games, sports, or horrid-sounding movies like *National Treasure*. It's so difficult to meet interesting people these days, but if one doesn't take chances, one won't make any friends at all. Of course it doesn't help when one is a recluse, but I suppose we aren't that reclusive; it's just that I find social encounters difficult, even a bit terrifying, and thus avoid them. I inevitably say something to frighten the other person off, by putting my foot in my mouth, being outlandish or grotesque, or inadvertently insulting.

Lucie's reading and the cats are asleep. Outside, Christmas lights appear as faint, colourful blobs amidst the thick fog. Between blasts of the distant

fog horns I hear a drunken chorus of “Jingle Bells” from a neighborhood prostitute. I’d like to record it and send it to Andrew who is of late sending me divers snippets of his life in the form of digital photographs, movies, and recordings, each one mysterious, poignant, poetic, sublime. If I weren’t such a luddite, I could play the game, too; my mistake is reacting against the hoopla for technology by eschewing it. Of course the medium isn’t to blame. I’ll have to find out what kind of gadget he has; until then, I do have a digital camera, and in a roundabout fashion I can record things and convert them to computer files—only it’s a pity I wasn’t prepared to capture the fog horns and “Jingle Bells”.

§ **December 16.** . I’ve just received in the mail my new checks. The online form had offered a free monogram, which I chose in a Gothic typeface; it also suggested I specify a free message. Finding their example of “God bless America” a bit too sappy I chose instead “Il faut épater le bourgeois” in an elegant script.

Lucie and I left the city early to beat the traffic so we might arrive in time for Carmella’s exhibit in Oakland. We were in fact too early, thus were obliged to wander about a little park outside the city hall which was swarming with homeless people who were drawn to us as zombies to living flesh, “What a lovely hat! Now gimme some money,” or, “Are you going to a graduation? How ’bout \$1.25 for a hungry old man?” At last the doors to the gallery opened and we hastened indoors. Carmella was busy buttering up a critic, so Lucie and I walked around with Guy looking at the art, which I found depressing, the very epitome of the banal masquerading as the profound. Even Carmella’s work has shed its mystery in favour of cuteness, its weak ideas unable to compensate for the lack of visual interest.

Afterwards, dinner at an awful, trendy Indian restaurant filled with insufferable Berkeley types and their babies. We had to wait forty-five minutes for a table, something I never do, especially when there is a perfectly nice Indian restaurant across the street with several empty tables. But that one wasn’t trendy enough; Carmella made sure we understood that bloody Alice Waters was known to have eaten at this one. Carmella was perpetually on the verge of a tantrum; the following dialogue representing the prevailing tenor of the evening’s conversation:

CARMELLA: (After my leg had gently brushed hers.) What are you doing?!?



ME: I'm sorry, I was just trying to cross my legs. (Everyone looks at Carmella.)

LUCIE: What's going on?

CARMELLA: He's kicking me violently over here!

It's only a matter of time before Carmella drops us; heaven knows we've indulged *her* neurotic behaviour long enough.

§ **December 17.** . Slept late, but then had to go to the office to put out several fires. In the afternoon there was an ad hoc Christmas party, replete with mulled wine, frosted brownies, cookies with sprinkles, &c. In the spirit of the moment I ate one of the brownies and nearly overdosed on sugar. I must have had a disagreeable countenance because Wanda looked at me and said, "We can change the music to something else." Currently playing was bluegrass Christmas music. "No, it's fine, really," I replied, but to my relief she put on Vince Guaraldi. In a rare burst of sociability, I joined in the conversations about popular movies, sports, and computers, and even got a few nervous laughs with my witty but strange bon mots, clever (perhaps too clever) quips, and droll anecdotes; they doubtlessly had the cumulative effect, however, of causing everyone present to shun me even more. Was it my own paranoia or did I succeed in clearing the room? But I wasn't the last to leave!

Back in the city, Lucie and I drove out to the far reaches of the Sunset to eat at a favourite Mexican restaurant, sort of a culinary security blanket, reminiscent of the kinds of restaurants we both grew up dining at. On this occasion, as every, we ate too much and spent the remainder of the evening reclining on the divan, watching old movies.

§ **December 18.** . Lucie skipped the last day of her drawing class; instead, after a luncheon of Italian food, we went downtown to people watch, then met Chimes to see that new film about the unfortunate children. Contrary to all expectations, I found it positively delightful. This, despite the theater being sold out and crowded with crying babies, ringing portable telephones, loud crunching sounds, foul odours, &c., which quite honestly didn't bother me that much. We afterwards took the M to West Portal to try out a Polish restaurant; once again we were successful, the food, service, and atmosphere easily meeting our high standards.

In bed at 1:00. I lay there wondering at how it felt like I had just been in bed only moments ago. My days of late are blurring into each other, like the view from the window of a speeding train. If only I could make do with less sleep; I could arise earlier and seize the morning with vigour, making my meticulous toilet, perhaps writing several pages of my novel, walking to the ocean and back, answering correspondence, taking a luxurious breakfast with Lucie, all before, say, 9:00 a.m. This phenomenon seems to be getting worse with age, but I don't know how to stop it.

§ **December 20.** . The squirrels have returned in the tree outside my office window, although I understand they are probably different squirrels. What a racket these two make, chasing each other up and down the tree, then across the roof of the building; one would think it was two elephants. I must take this opportunity to say that the French word for squirrel, “écureuil”, is one of my favourite words in any language.

What a busy day of errands—an oil change for the flivver; pick up Lucie's art supplies from her locker at the Institute before they cut off the lock; an injection against tuberculosis for my new tutoring position; and deposit a cheque from Father. Oh yes, I had to have my fingerprints taken, also for my new tutoring position. Afterwards, I was vaguely paranoid about something from my past returning to haunt me. As my fingers had been pressed against glass that so many other grubby, criminal fingers had touched, I sought les toilettes in order to wash them. I did manage to find a sandwich shop where I could wash them; I considered for a moment staying, but they were playing music too loudly, one couldn't read or even think. Where are all the cafés in this town? I know where a few are, but none were close enough to where I was. One could choose from a number of sandwich shops, coffee shops (but they're not really cafés, not in the European sense), fast food restaurants, each of these good for little but aggravation and discomfort. At last I wandered into the SFMOMA but their café was closed; I instead browsed the books in the gift shop hoping to find something on Leonor Fini; I did not, but I did come across a book about Otto Dix. I had forgotten about him! I used to find his work grotesque, but now I am older and can better appreciate the grotesque. The book was \$20; perhaps I can find it used somewhere.

I arrived early to the train depot so I sat and watched people, a favourite pastime. As the temperature never climbed out of the 40s to-day, I marveled at all the people wearing short trousers. Due to the chill air, these are obviously not worn for comfort, as one might expect, but for a different

reason, which I must say completely eludes me.

Unlike the gorgeous depot of the early twentieth century, which was torn down by greedy, artless bureaucrats, the new one is a slap in the face of beauty, a glass and steel nightmare not only devoid of all charm and subtlety, but badly designed on even a utilitarian level. Someone tried and failed to bring some cheer into the dismal hangar in the form of a life-sized Santa Claus draped with lights and ornaments and surrounded by orange traffic cones and “Do not touch” signs. One really had to laugh if not cry. At intervals I read from Baudelaire’s *Spleen de Paris*, analysing each piece, deciding if I agree or disagree with the sentiments expressed therein and if they could apply to present-day San Francisco. One thing I still do not understand is Baudelaire’s apparent sympathy for beggars, who, if one believes the author, lived a sublime existence of sorts. I look at those of the streets of my own neighborhood and I confess I see no poetry, only catastrophic failure, wilful self-destruction, and the basest misery. Perhaps Baudelaire saw something of himself in them.

Lucie arrived on the 5:45. I do enjoy our walks home together although lately made increasingly difficult due to the maddening throngs of holiday shoppers saddled down with piles of bags and packages, the sidewalks bottlenecked where each beggar squats, fast food cup outstretched in the hope it will fill with riches. I was complimented on my wing-tipped boots twice, which both pleases and annoys me. I dress well to please myself and Lucie and do not require the admiration of others. When it comes, it is always from a slob, who with little effort could themselves look presentable, or from those who mean it as a veiled challenge, “Are you going someplace *special*?” One is obliged to answer in the affirmative, something like, “Yes, we’re attending the prince’s ball” although my reply is always, “No, I am just out for a stroll,” a response which is always received with a doubtful scowl; one thinks I am lying and is thus insulted. “Out for a stroll...hummmph!” they think.

Feeling very much the Tolkien nerd, I watched with Lucie two discs’ worth of documentaries relating to *The Return of the King*; to bed at 12:30.

**§ December 25.** . Lucie and I were awakened at 3:30 by a bullhorn. We rushed to the window and looked downward. In the middle of the street lay two villains, arms and legs outspread. At the end of the block were several police cars; an officer was speaking into a megaphone, “This is the San Francisco Police Department. Come out with your hands up. If

you do not, we will send in the dogs and you will be bit [sic]. This is not a joke, &c.” I think he was speaking to someone in the bar at the corner, which we can’t see because it’s on the same side of the street. Presently, three more villains appeared and lay in the street. Adding a more surreal aspect to the scene were the following: a taxi parked directly below us in the middle lane, its driver regarding the events with casual interest; the sound of a power tool, perhaps a drill, its source unknown to me; raucous cheering and singing in the shadows; a small crowd of neighborhood denizens. The streets were otherwise empty and still. Where was the cheering crowd, and what were they cheering about? Who was drilling? What did the taxi have to do with the men lying in the street? By degrees the men were frisked, restrained, and ushered into various squad cars. Lucie and I were too cold, so we shut the window and returned to bed, but the cheering and singing continued well beyond dawn. We eventually realised that there had been a party across the street, its revelers apparently had been completely unaware of the drama just below their window.

Lucie is ill, thus to our mutual relief we didn’t drive to Orange County to see her mother. Rather, we enjoyed a quiet day wining and dining, watching Buster Keaton films, and listening to Lucie’s childhood album of Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians’ demented versions of popular Christmas tunes; these appear on Side A only, the reverse side dedicated to the more sappy, religious songs of the kind a God-fearing sentimental person might enjoy. Being *de facto* Satanists, Christmas to Lucie and me is a holiday of pagan sensibilities, dedicated chiefly to hedonistic pursuits in high style. We did decorate a small tree with Victorian ornaments; in our windows, large, colorful lights of the kind remembered from our childhoods. Being lean of pocket, we bought no gifts nor sent any cards, although we have decided that next year we may exchange a few small gifts in the spirit of making merry. Poor Kenneth, who must have been so traumatized by unhappy childhood events and so appalled by the present-day commercial aspect of the season, won’t allow anyone to even mention the word “Christmas” in his presence, although tomorrow he is throwing his annual “Christmas Is Over!” party, which we look forward to as his parties are always attended by more than a few flamboyant characters and eccentrics.

§ **December 31.** . It’s midnight. Lucie and I have just finished watching *Night Must Fall*, and now *M* has just started; some men are bickering round a table—one should see their smoking implements! One chap has

what looks like a briar pipe, but from its bowl protrudes a cigar pointed upwards to the ceiling!

On a completely unrelated note, I wanted to scribble a few quick words about beer. I've never cared much for it, but I drink it sometimes in the spirit of conviviality. Not the swill one finds in supermarkets or convenience stores, but the specialty beers, with interesting names, attractively bottled, from distant lands. It's funny...at this moment, someone in France is probably saying the same thing about Pabst Blue Ribbon. Or perhaps not! I don't mind dark beers when served very cold, but I prefer the lighter ones. Last week I tried several trappist ales, none of which I liked; on this night I tried a Belgian *bière blanche* called Hoegaarden. The idea of a cloudy, white beer I find appealing; indeed, it had a lovely appearance. I wanted to like it; alas, I find I don't care for it either. I am enjoying my search for a favourite beer very much; as with other pursuits, the searching can be as rewarding as the discovery.



# Chapter 7

## 2005

§ **January 1.** . Lucie and I stayed up until dawn talking about love, beauty, and friendship, then slept until 2:30 in the afternoon. We took the car downtown for the purchase of a particular brand of specialty tooth powder; I sat in the car reading *Good Morning, Midnight* while Lucie braved the New Year's Eve hordes. I had forgotten the shops would be swarmed with patrons redeeming gift certificates, exchanging hated gifts, and snapping up bargains. Used to living against the grain, I am always vexed when our endeavors accidentally coincide with those of the mob. After the chaos of the grocer's we went to the Old Chelsea on Larkin only to find that it didn't open until four (it was yet three), so we took our luncheon at Little Henry's. While waiting for the waitress to bring our food, a pair of newlyweds entered and took their seats. His shirt tail untucked and hair disheveled, the groom was missing his tuxedo jacket. On his arm, his bride, a man made up to look like a woman, in a diaphanous wedding gown under which one could see his undergarments. The groom kept referring to the bride as "Christine, my special lady" as he kissed her hands, neck, and cheeks. "I forgot my wallet!" he announced to the room. "Can I write a check?" The waitress replied, "You pay later." Both of them the victims of plastic surgery gone amok, Lucie and I stole amused, furtive glances in their direction as the groom made one scene after another, spilling wine, complaining about the service, going to the toilet, expressing his confusion over the paper towel dispenser therein, making loud toasts, and being a general nuisance. By degrees I began to suspect the groom didn't know his wife was a man. After paying for our

meal we got into the car and remained there for the duration of a sudden hail storm, watching as people ran hurriedly for shelter. Both of us affected greatly by events meteorological, our spirits soared as we were delighted by the tiny pellets of ice dancing across the pavement.

After spending part of the evening seaching the 8th, 9th and 10th floors for the elusive breaker switch which would restore electricity to our apartment, we broke open the Veuve Cliquot, put on an album of Harry Reser and his Veuve Cliquot Eskimos (I couldn't resist), and looked at the parties in the windows of numerous nearby apartments, the traffic, and revelers below from our cozy urban aerie. We were particularly entertained, and alternately disturbed, by the events in a bathroom window across the street, in which we beheld people, besides the customary activities, having sexual encounters and being sick. To bed at a quarter after.

§ **January 4.** . In the dental waiting room I finished *Good Morning, Midnight*; I didn't bring anything else to read and didn't feel like writing in my notebook, so I grabbed a nearby magazine called *People*. Inside were pictures of divers vulgar celebrities doing and saying banal things. I recognized no one except for Cate Blanchett, whose visage of terrible beauty looked very much out of place among such dread company. Oh, and I recognized her elvish cousin, Liv Tyler as well. What is the "American Idol", I wonder? Fortunately, I became bogged down in a sea of advertisements and lost interest, spending the rest of my time spying on the receptionist, noting her mannerisms, overhearing her whispered comments about various patients to Karen who I believe is really a man. Presently, Karen came over to where I was seated and asked why I cancelled my appointment to get a crown installed. "Is it anything we did?" she asks, all smiles. "Is is the cost?" She put on her sales face and rattled off a spiel about "educational literature", their website, &c. I felt cornered and hounded. Taking advantage of a pause, I interjected, "I just need some time to get used to it, then I'll make another appointment." She continued, "Is it the pain?" then added something about how Dr. Whipple administers a "pain-relieving cocktail" guaranteed to send me floating away. "No, it's not the pain. It's the *idea* of it, which I find horrifying." Upon hearing the word "horrifying", her face fell; she then mumbled and nodded before shrinking away back to her desk.

Soon I was seated in a comfy chair, staring out across the bay towards Alcatraz. Storm clouds loomed on the horizon; I hoped it would rain again. She looked at my chart and said, "Hi, I'm Linda. How are we today, Julian?"



I winced at “we” as well as the use of my first name; I wanted to say, “It’s *Mr. Vodrázka*,” but that just isn’t done anymore. She would be hurt and confused which isn’t a wise thing to do to someone who is jabbing dental instruments into one’s mouth. I craned my neck to catch a glimpse of her name tag, but it simply read “Linda”. “Good afternoon...Linda.” I felt like slapping her familiarly on the back. She proceeded to polish my teeth *first*, then she used an ultrasonic device in lieu of the crude implements one is used to. It wasn’t painful at all, but the high-pitched whine of the ultrasonic device was rather irritating.

Afterwards, Lucie and I took our luncheon at the Pinecrest, one of San Francisco’s last “authentic” diners. No gratuitous neon, no “gourmet” burgers, no black ‘n’ white tile, no posters of James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, and no jukebox stocked with Elvis 45s. Only an honest club sandwich, low prices, bad lighting, ’70s-era upholstery, and the fading memories of a gruesome murder. On the way home, we stopped into the Candelier for candles. How I adore wax! The way it feels, and smells. I could never work in such a place; I would be caught in the stock room leaving my teeth marks in the merchandise.

Lucie and I spent the evening playing Scrabble, both of us dreading a return to the office after two weeks. I *must* make at least a brief appearance, to assert my position in the company lest I am deleted from the payroll. I’ll process a few high-profile files, send out a couple of important sounding courriels, shuffle some papers, clear my throat loudly, then out the door in time to use the carpool lane before its hours begin at 3:00. I dare not complain, for it could be much, much worse. Why, telecommuting is brilliant!

§ **January 6.** . After a breakfast of yogurt and honey, Lucie and I left the house for what seemed like the first time in weeks. Ah, the sunshine! We ducked into storefronts like a couple of vampires, although Lucie had the good sense to bring a parasol. Accompanied Lucie to several department stores to pay bills; I had to pick up two suits from the cleaners. Into horrid Walgreens for moustache wax, which they actually had in stock, although I had to ask three different clerks. “M-o-u-s-t-a-c-h-e w-a-x,” I said, pointing at my moustache. One could barely hear oneself think over the din of the Muzak (I don’t know what else to call it), James Brown bobble head dolls, and talking basses. My moustache is almost at the length whereby I need to make certain decisions about its future shape; I’d like it to look something like <http://www.oursecretlives.com/julian/Moustache2.jpg> this fellow’s.

At home Lucie hopped into the bath, requesting “funeral music”. I played her all the funeral music I could find in our collection, which was a startling amount, really. Purcell’s music for Queen Mary’s funeral,

§ **Marches funèbres.** from various piano sonatas, elegiac pieces, Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*, the Sanctus from Fauré’s *Requiem*, Ravel’s *Pavanne for a Dead Princess*, &c.; as Lucie detests Mozart, I was surprised she didn’t complain when I played his *Masonic Funeral Music*, but she drew the line when I put on an old 78 of “Taps”.

I’ve scrapped yet another attempt at what I hoped would be a short story. The trouble is, I bore myself. I want to write the kinds of stories I’d want to read; one would think that wouldn’t be so difficult, right? Lucie and I stayed up until 3:00 a.m. discussing Carmella’s decision to give up painting in favour of writing; Andrew’s trouble finding a publisher and recent talk about robbing banks; how publishing has changed over the last century and what one has to do to “succeed”. I recalled the days when Andrew and I had, in the spirit of the early Modernists, wanted to create our own literary magazine. We wrote a statement of purpose, solicited contributions, and even had a name. I recall that one poet who took us seriously and hounded us for months, “When will the first issue be ready?” But it took a certain something that we apparently lacked, chiefly, money, although I’m probably the one whose attention wandered toward other endeavours, such as my music, which I later renounced in order to write. Fifteen years later, I ask, “What have I written?” Like Brian Howard, I haven’t lived up to my promise; of course, he was far cleverer than I will ever be. Oh, to be clever!

§ **January 9.** . After sleeping in, Lucie and I spent the day in flânerie *flagrante*, savouring the rain upon our heads, ducking into video stores for arcane treats, admiring architecture in Pacific Heights, and seeking canning jars. We ended up visiting divers scenic locales along the coast, the arms of the unquiet sea beckoning, *come to me...* We didn’t stray from the cliff’s edge, but others answered the call; we observed far below a group of surfers, riding the waves along the jagged rocks, stubbornly insisting by their mere presence in the frigid waters that they’re having a good time. I shivered and drew Lucie closer to me.

The rest of the afternoon Lucie spent making lemon marmalade, the most delicious I have ever eaten! There are several jars of this nectar of the

gods, some of which will be distributed amongst certain of our colleagues. Lucie may pout about her painting, which to me holds much promise, but she is more importantly adept at the art of living well, the greatest revenge against the artless hordes.

Later in the evening we watched *Il posto* and for the second time *The 28th Instance of 1914*, that most excellent document of the genius of Messrs. McDermott & McGough, the viewing of which renewed my resolve to assert proper style, etiquette, and behaviour in a society in which these qualities, generally speaking, have disappeared. Whilst searching various resources for any trace of their historical organ *The Cottage* without success, I have decided to create a bibliography of works by and about these two gentlemen to aid fellow dandies and aesthetes in their quest for inspiration. I should very much like to get my hands on a single copy; perhaps I can rely on an old acquaintance at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Texas.

Meanwhile, the lobby of our building is flooded and reeks of mold. The patio was recently redesigned by a well-meaning but witless individual on the architecture committee; he took what was an ordinary but not unpleasant recreational area and made it look rather like a helicopter landing pad. A door was cut through to the lobby for enhanced access; the first time I saw the new ramp which led to it I wondered where the water was going to go. Apparently nobody else wondered this, but now we all know.

I look out our window towards the tiered slopes of Nob Hill, and my eye is drawn towards a turn-of-the-century (the last one) apartment building which some imbecile has painted the back of; what was once an unmolested and quite beautiful brick wall has been covered in a bright white latex more suited to the hull of a fishing boat. Once bricks are painted, the paint cannot easily be removed – surely those vandals responsible for this sorry deed know this? However, I must remember to not let such things spoil my happiness; for after all, the view in general is a lovely sight and we are lucky to have it.

I have lately been inspired to return to music in the capacity of a pianist with the goal of recording an album of pieces in the manner of the preludes of Shostokovich or Debussy, or Alkan's "La Chanson de la folle au bord de la mer"; the trouble is that I have no piano nor can I play very well, being capable of handling the complexity of, say, the early works of Harold Budd, or the simplest of Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* and no more. Should a piano be purchased for the lobby (there has been some talk of it), it might not be unrealistic to succeed in this endeavour, as I already possess the necessary recording equipment.

§ **January 10.** . I have two complaints about modern releases of silent films. First, the credits and titles are often presented in an anachronistic or simply inappropriate typeface. With a glut of vintage typefaces available, here is a missed opportunity to do the job well. If one knew what he was doing, he could make titles which would fool anyone into believing they were original. For example, one could easily use a computer to “age” the titles to make them more similar to the rest of the film; otherwise the contrast between the scratchy old original and the crisp digital titles favoured to-day is jarring. Second, the music. Rarely does the original sound survive, hence the need to create a new soundtrack. When the original score is available, attempts are often made to record it, often with disastrous results. The modern interpretation almost always feels somehow wrong; no attempt is made to make the music sound they way it might have sounded originally. In particular, the drumming is always anachronistic. The rest of the instruments are often played with a certain nostalgic sensibility, a band of thoroughly modern musicians trying to evoke the “mood” of the past without bothering to, or even knowing how, to get the details right. At the very least, why not record the music in mono, using period microphones and recording equipment, with added scratches for that authentic feel? One might say that’s like painting a “faux finish” on a wall to make it seem old, but I don’t think it’s a fair comparison. Having had some experience composing and recording music, I think it can be done well enough.

Oddly enough, there is a modern composer who contributed music to the short films of the Brothers Quay in the ’80s and ’90s which sounds like it could have come from avant-garde silent films of the ’30s. It’s in mono and has a genuine feel to it that is remarkable. Last night, Lucie and I watched *A Woman of Paris* (1923) and the music was so unbearably horrid that I suggested to Lucie we turn the sound completely off, but then she came up with the idea to play the soundtrack from the Quay Brothers’ films over this one. The result was brilliant; certain sounds cued up uncannily while others brought to the otherwise straightforward comedy a sinister, surreal aspect. Lucie and I sat spellbound as, for example, a woman arrives to a party and the only sound is that of crickets; or, Adophle Menjou picks up a saxophone and plays the most eerie, otherworldly music.

On a completely unrelated note, Lucie and I are searching unsuccessfully for a *chaise longue*. They’re either too ugly, too wrecked, or too expensive. And there are so few of them I feel our quest is hopeless. I think it’s about time we took a road trip to Sacramento and environs, where we have had

some luck in the past with other pieces of furniture.

January 11. Oh, my aching feet. Perhaps due to a hidden streak of masochism, I volunteered to represent my employer at a convention called Macworld. My arrival was fraught with difficulties. While approaching the wrong counter in the wrong building for my exhibitor's badge, I would not negotiate a maze of velvet ropes; "I am not a rat," I responded to an irate security guard. After I at last acquired the badge, my name naturally misspelled, I was oblig'd to wait in line to ride an elevator downstairs with dozens of others, all of us for reasons unknown denied the use of several perfectly good staircases.

McWorld was an assault upon one's senses. Smell: halitosis, popcorn, mothballs (as a group of elderly Chinese ladies walked by). Sound: every song you've ever hated playing at once, the nasally Mercedes spokesman, the Spin Doctors playing hacky-sack music on a nearby stage, the sickening throb of a subwoofer in the Clarion hi-fi booth, *doom, doom*, Bob Marley from the Eunitek booth, people talking about megabytes and "eye pods". Taste: mints, plasticky bottled water. Touch: limp handshakes, firm handshakes, pamphlets, the crunch of popcorn under foot. Sight: car headlights from the Mercedes booth pointed at our booth, people in those skinny glasses, top-drawer people watching. Quote of the day, from an elderly gentleman: "I've never read a novel in my life...and I don't like music, neither!" I asked one woman about her name, Lamb. "I shortened it from Lambert," she explained, "because I had to say my name all the time on the phone." "I just use a monogram," I countered, perhaps a bit impertinently. "Okaaayyy," was her reply as she backed slowly away from me. While I was talking to this woman, someone spilled popcorn before the booth behind my back. By the time I noticed it, it had been trampled and kicked all over in a big mess, which I had to look at the rest of the afternoon. The day's saving grace was a sublime luncheon at the Café Bastille, on the company's dime.

During the few lulls, I jotted down notes for a novel idea. An *à rebours* for to-day, the protagonist not of minor nobility but of a suburban middle-class upbringing, who finds work intolerable (borrow from my own experiences of paid employment) thus resorts to a life of crime to furnish his apartment; chronicle his hypochondriasis and his laughable efforts to find love (borrow from my own history), his absurd foray into sartorial extravagance which brings him only ridicule and penury, his attempts to assert his own manners, style, and behaviour upon a society in which such things count for little. Discuss his (ahem, *my*) tastes in art, music, and literature. Show

how the *fin-de-siècle* decadent lifestyle is as impracticable to-day as it was in Huysmans' time, or is it?

At 6:00 I hurried home to Lucie's welcoming arms and a delicious meal of flageolet beans and Italian chicken sausages. I *almost* gave in to the temptation to egg someone below who was blaring their car horn without cessation in the hopes that the person who blocked our building's driveway would appear and move their own car, all apologies.

§ **January 12.** . Another day at Macworld contemplating my own mortality. How many days have I wasted at conventions? Standing in line? Holding the line? Filling out forms? Sitting in waiting rooms? One can't wait to live, so I tried to live at Macworld by jotting things down, eavesdropping, swiping things from other booths, and insulting people in veiled ways. Escaped for an hour to attend a recital at St. Patrick's; Ravel's *Tzigane*, Messaien's *Thème et variations*, and Ravel's *Trio*. The performance was pleasing but for the intermittent wheeze of a workman's power tool.

After my return to Moscone I wolfed down a \$14 roast beef sandwich. Dinah made an appearance later in the afternoon; when we weren't swamped with questions, she made me read various Kipling poems on the internet. I'm not the greatest Kipling fan but I oblig'd her in case I'd learn something. Oh, I saw two people I recognized; a balding fellow from my Z bus days and Pamela, an old colleague. She didn't see me because I hid behind a rayon curtain. Notable conversation of the day:

WOMAN: Do you know where the popcorn people are?

ME: Oh, those half-human, half-popcorn mutants with the "eye-pods"? [Remember how bored I was.]

WOMAN: No. [Her face remained expressionless, as if I had not made any sort of jest at all.]

The rest is even duller...

§ **January 13.** . Hmm...I took five pages of notes for this day. I transcribe them all here as written...

Stumbled out of bed at 4:45, dressed, kissed Lucie, kissed Mr. Darcy and Miss Moppet, then drove to the airport. Waiting for the shuttle bus in the long-term parking lot; four women laughing uproariously over how funny someone called Jan Wahl "with the hat" is. With them, a miserable-looking

young man with sleep still in his eyes, his hair sticking up in back. The bus arrived. At the first stop, some of the women jump up, grab their luggage, and make to disembark. “Is this our stop?” one of the seated women says. “No, we’re not on Alaska Airlines,” another says. “We’re Terminal 2.” “This is Terminal 2,” &c.

After a relatively painless check-in, the obligatory rat’s maze in bare feet. “Please remove your coat.” “Please remove other coat.” I joked to the elderly gentleman behind me, “This is the second time I’ve gotten dressed this morning,” eliciting from him a riotous chuckle. Encouraged by this favourable response, I continued, “Has anyone seen my suspenders?” More laughs from a couple behind him. “My shirt’s inside out!” Silence. I was bombing.

Waiting at the gate. A man dressed as for a triathalon sat next to me eating what looked like was a container of baby back ribs. Overheard conversation from group to my left:

MAN IN WHEELCHAIR: Sha-wiiiiing!

SEVERAL WOMEN: [laughing hysterically], &c.

No water at the snack bar, but they did have something called “Snap 2-0”. The ingredients listed spring water from Baxter Spring. I sipped it suspiciously.

It’s 6:05. Why the hell did they say to get here so early?

Another athlete is seated next to me, his legs spread wide to maximize the space he occupies. This is to make himself appear more threatening to predators, or prey. His hands are behind his head; his expression: “Behold how comfortable I am!” Now he can’t keep still, fidgeting, fussing with a cell phone, fussing with an iPod, rummaging through his duffel bag, &c.

I hear a loud man say, “She’s a dynamite lady!” His companions, including the dynamite lady, are laughing gleefully. Why is everyone so gleeful this early in the morning? Someone is staring at me and probably thinking, “Poor fellow, hasn’t had his coffee yet.”

Folded into my aisle seat like origami. Two nice old ladies next to me—thank God. Praying someone doesn’t spill anything on me. Too irritable to read, so I distract myself by writing snide captions and comments in the complimentary *American Way* magazine.

Postmodern television programs. “The Amazing Race”, “Joan of Arcadia”, &c. Now that retro-futuristic movie with Alfie and Gwenneth Paltrow

has begun. Even without the \$5 headphones I can tell it's a stinker. Repeated scenes of people struggling to reach weapons, extending their fingers desperately as danger approaches. Just in time! Bang! (Again.)

The old ladies and I talk about Boston. The one nearest me has a bad stutter. They are intelligent. We joke about the "Craisins" and the faux cheese spread. The overhead bins were full, so my suitcase is jammed in front of me, my feet resting on top of it. I achieve a modicum of comfort by squirming into a position rather like lying down sideways, at an angle.

Idea for the character of J.P. in my novel...model him after Cullen Davis.

Boston at last. Blowing fog, melted snow. A rickety old subway, the smell of grease. Parisian-style but ugly; simple but for the confusion of unfamiliarity. I get off two stops too late, due to a navigational error. Walk several blocks back to the College Club. There is architecture here! French-inspired High Victorian, with traces of Art Nouveau and Gothic Revival. Several imposing Gothic churches. Old brick sidewalks, warped where the tree roots push up. Low-wattage old-fashioned street lamps made to resemble gas lamps of the Victorian era.

I check into my room, then go out to dine. A Mexican place in an alley, Public Alley 352. The alleys are named like that here. Old Mexican and Aztec decor. Most excellent food. Salsa is chunky, fresh, cilantroey. Mexican food as exotic food. Huitlacoche on menu; I think of Biber in Mexico City. A couple seated next to me talking about publishing. Had wanted to meet Andrew's Tonton Gregoire this evening but there had been a death. Maybe to-morrow night, before I go to Cambridge? Walk back on Newbury. Rather like a combination of Union Square, Union St. and Fillmore St., with a Thomas Kinkadee gallery tossed in as an extra incentive. Yuppies everywhere.

Back in room. The tinkle of a distant piano. Creaky wooden floors, thirteen-foot ceilings. Lumpy faux antique bed. Why is it so warm? It was 38 when the plane landed, now it feels like it's 63. Read an article I found on the internet and printed out about McDermott & McGough, then began *A Handful of Dust*. After calling Lucie, lights out at 9:15. How I wish Lucie were here! And the kitties.

§ **January 14.** . Without the correct badge, I waltzed right into the exhibit hall undeterred by the daydreaming security guard. Everything still in crates, but why? Presently, I learned the exhibits aren't open until 5:30. After a quick glance around to see if there was anything worth stealing, I



bolted for the exit. The rest of the morning was a whirlwind of antiquarian bookstores, Gothic churches, graveyards, parks, tobacconists and architecture. For Lucie I purchased an etiquette book from 1877. As I headed back to the convention center, the rain turned to sleet which stung my face. I want to return with Lucie and re-trace my steps, experiencing again each moment with her so it may count.

Mr. Jenkins wasn't at the booth but Wilma was. To my embarrassment, she asked about that faux Van Dongen painting I had bought in San Antonio; I had forgotten all about it! I think it's under a pile of papers in my office. While wandering the aisles nearby to appear "professional", I was approached by a humanoid robot which began to say things at me. When I fled, I heard people laughing. After twenty more minutes of pretending to be interested in the exhibits, with occasional glances over my shoulder to see if Mr. Jenkins had arrived, I sprinted off to Cambridge, a walk which took an hour and a half including frequent stops at bookstores along the way. Upon my arrival at the "Coop", as it is called, I repaired to the café, ordered a tea, and took a seat with my back to the wall to watch for the Désars. As I was early, I had plenty of time to peruse a tobacconist's catalogue. As I studied the array of pipes and tobacco blends within, I looked up occasionally to regard strange faces. To appear more interesting, I posed several books on the table. At last, Mr. Désar approached, whom I recognized immediately from photographs. "Mr. Désar, I presume," I said nervously. We shook hands, and quit the building whereupon we joined the missus; to our mutual surprise they had been waiting for me outside.

The three of us repaired to an Italian joint around the corner where we talked until closing time. Unused to meeting interesting people, I became long-winded and inarticulate as I struggled to convey various crucial ideas regarding "our sort of people"; when we parted I expressed my concern at having talked too much, to which Renée said, warmly, "Oh, not at all!" Lucien I found affable and easy to talk to, while Renée I found more soft-spoken and somewhat reserved; I sense in her a sensitivity similar to Lucie's. Observing a compatibility more than is ever hoped for in new acquaintances, I suspect if we lived in the same city we'd be great friends. Upon my return to the hotel, I called Lucie and recounted the entire evening in as much detail as I could remember. After turning out the light, I lay in bed and wondered if my cynicism had been disagreeable to the uncommonly sweet Désars. Do I appear to others the *bon vivant* I believe myself to be? Or do I come across as a brooding, wet blanket? Time will tell, if the Désars cancel our rendezvous

to-morrow.

§ **January 15.** . Jolted out of bed at 8:15 in order to get to a meeting on time, but was it the right meeting? After a game of “twenty questions” with a couple of horrid women it was ascertained I was indeed in the right place, but I quickly realised I didn’t actually *need* to sit through the entire dull thing, which it turned out was to begin thirty minutes later than advertised. For appearance’s sake, I shook a few hands, exchanged business cards, even sat and sipped a glass of water; when one of the horrid women approached the rostrum and cleared her throat, I indiscreetly fled, leaving an overturned chair in my wake.

I explored Beacon Hill and had a lengthy luncheon on the company’s dime before catching the train to Salem. Chez Désar, a most excellent evening of ’20s jazz, friendly cats, albino frogs, mystery snails, curious books, vintage photographs of men with moustaches, scrapbooks from the ’20s, stuffed octopi (to be squeezed and not eaten), pie, and fine conversation. Following a lazy tour of Salem we dined at an Indian establishment; after which Lucien and Renée drove me back to Boston.

While I was sipping chartreuse in the company of charming new friends, poor Lucie was suffering a dreadful evening with Chimes and his paramour at that awful Absinthe restaurant. We spoke on the telephone about our respective socialising until 2:30, whereupon I fell into an abyssal slumber.

§ **January 16.** . Up at 6:30 after only four hours of sleep. Took the “T” to South Station, then boarded a train to New York. I looked out the window at the frozen landscape and wondered what it would be like to live in places like Providence, Stamford, or New Haven. Very tweezy, I should imagine, or Martha Stewarty. But then I recalled the New England settings of Lovecraft, especially that of rural Massachusetts. I wanted to indulge this sinister change of mood, but between the odd stretch of rather benevolent-looking woods, the proliferation of colourful playgrounds, fast food restaurants, and auto dealerships ruined it for me.

At Penn Station, I dutifully ingested a meal of sorts. In the toilettes, loud baroque music discouraged loitering, under the reasonable assumption that the people who enjoy loitering in toilettes and the people who enjoy baroque music are mutually exclusive. An overheard conversation:

MAN IN STALL #1: Fuck! Don't motherfuckin' touch my leg *again*, motherfucker.

MAN IN STALL #2: Sorry.

I had planned on reading the whole way betwixt New York and Buffalo, but two things, each sufficiently annoying on their own, conspired to prevent this. First of all, after I had chosen my seat with care and settled down to the long jaunt upstate, I was joined by a group of ill-bred young men and ladies who filled the rows before and behind me. Dressed in hooded sweatshirts and enormous trousers which pooled at their ankles, each shouted over my head to the others in a mode of conversation which excluded the words one might find in the O.E.D. The gentleman behind me spent most of the eight-hour journey making rhythmical spitting and huffing sounds with his mouth to the beat of the music leaking from his headphones, *boom*, chick, *boom*, *boom*, huff, huff...

Secondly, the car in which I traveled was heated to a degree which a hothouse flower such as myself should have found agreeable, but I in fact did not. Covering the vents near my feet with complimentary copies of *Arrive* magazine (after first writing in them snide captions and comments) and shedding as much clothing as I dared, I survived only by making frequent trips to the vestibule at the end of the car, which wasn't heated and into which snow blew from the cracks between cars, forming little snowdrifts.

Father, Beatriz and Matthias met me at the depot. Upon returning home, Father and I conversed until midnight. After telephoning Lucie, I went to sleep in Miklos' old room, in a wobbly bed six inches shorter than I am tall.

§ **January 17.** . It snowed sideways all day. Luncheon with Father and Matthias at a generic "50s-style" diner, replete with posters of James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, bad neon, black & white linoleum tile, wrinkled old waitresses, and an annoying electric train hooting every ten seconds. To Blockbusters (I would never normally set foot in the wretched place, doing so this time only to humour Father, who wouldn't understand) whereupon Father said, "We each get to choose *one* movie," stressing "one" for Matthias' sake. I raced for the Foreign section, only to find it stocked chiefly with Japanese cartoons. Alright, off to the Classics section, then, but where is it? I waited in line to ask at the front counter, only to be told they were mixed in with the other sections. I tried to think of films Father, et al. would like and

which I could stand seeing again – *Paper Moon*, Hitchcock’s *Rope* (Father, a Jimmy Stewart fan, had never heard of it), or *A Place in the Sun*, but they were not to be had. In the end I chose *Glengarry Glen Ross*, which Father and Matthias loved. “There’s some *damn* good acting in this!” said Father afterwards. Matthias chose a dreadful stinker about the earth entering a new ice age overnight; Father chose *The Village*, which wasn’t quite as bad as I thought it would be. Beatriz joined us for a *just* edible dinner at a familiar-looking place called The Red Lobster, then we all went to a deserted mall so she could order some blinds. Matthias and I waited outside in the empty parking lot, where we observed a mountain of snow which had been plowed to one side. Matthias urged me to climb it, but I was fearful of my safety. On the way home, music wars in the car – father played an Alan Jackson CD which caused Matthias to howl in protest, “That’s all Dad listens to!”; Matthias played a disc of generic-sounding smooth flamenco jazz. “Oh, I *like* that!” exclaimed Beatriz, to which Matthias replied, “You should, Mom, it’s *your* CD.” At this jest Beatriz smiled good-naturedly. I produced from my satchel a disc of Fauré’s “Sonata for Violin & Piano” which I had purchased in Boston. “This isn’t *opera*, is it?” complained Father. “I can’t *stand* opera.” Everyone was silent throughout the first movement, perhaps due to the bourgeois notion that one is supposed to acknowledge the importance of classical music. Finally, Beatriz remarked, “This is a nice CD, Julian. Thanks for playing it for us.” As I ejected the disc, Matthias mumbled “thanks”, the way one thanks his grandmother who has given him a slice of stale fruitcake. After a short pause, Matthias added, “My school made us go to the symphony, once.” I asked him what the program was. “I don’t remember.” Oh, why do I even bother? To bed at 2:30 after telephoning Lucie, taking advantage of Father’s flat-fee long distance service.

I wince at what I have just written, as I sound like *such* a snob. But would it kill them to open their minds to a bit of *culture* for once? Of course, when I was Matthias’ age, I was listening to my parents’ forgotten Mantovani LPs, so there is always hope for him, if not for Father and Beatriz.

§ **January 18.** . Slept until noon-ish. After a curious luncheon of undercooked cinnamon muffins Matthias made, boiled eggs and leftover shrimp from The Red Lobster, Father drove me down to the lake to show me the frozen waves; it was like a scene from that *Day After Tomorrow* movie Matthias made me watch yesterday. Afterwards, we went to Beatriz’ mother’s house to take her to a new house to which she was moving. Beat-

riz' insufferable aunts were there, bumping into everyone with their walkers, smirking at everyone, arguing, and saying deadpan things like, "I just about shit my pants" in that thick New York accent. Everyone *loved* the new house, a rectangle of sheet rock and plywood with fluorescent lighting and baby blue carpet, bereft of style, nestled amongst similar houses in a nondescript cul-de-sac. I think the real estate agent, who met us there, was intimidated by Beatriz' formidable mother and aunts. He kept following me around, telling me about his son "who is just about your age" who just bought a loft in Manhattan for such-and-such amount of money, and asking me things like, "How much would a house like this go for in San Francisco? I'd figure about a half-million." After what seemed like hours Father and I left; on the way back home, Beatriz called, asking Father to stop by the store for corn tortillas. He looked at me and said, "She *always* does this. She *always* waits until the *last* minute." He said to Beatriz, "Where am I going to find corn tortillas at *this* hour? You *know* Wegman's won't have them, and I'm not about to drive all the way over to [name of some other store] when they probably won't have them, either." In the end, we ordered pizza 'n' wings, which were really rather tasty. It was decided that Beatriz will make her famous enchiladas tomorrow evening.

§ **January 19.** . Why is it that the colder it is outdoors, the hotter it is indoors? Just because it's 24 degrees outside doesn't mean it's necessary to make it 94 indoors. Fortunately, I had the foresight to pack my coat, hat, scarf, gloves, &c. while everyone else was wearing theirs, or else carrying them in their arms in a big pile. My flight was delayed two hours, one of which was spent sitting in the aeroplane on the tarmac. Consequently, I missed my connecting flight in Chicago, and thus had to take a later one. Once on board, it didn't take me long to notice that almost everyone was speaking French, everyone, that is, except the elderly Chinese woman with long hairs sprouting from her chin, who just sat down next to me with a garbage bag half-filled with clothes and what smelled like leftovers from The Red Lobster. Predictably, she swung it against my arm with a thud; when it bounced back and landed in her seat, she removed it with a sigh. I asked one of the gentlemen in front of me *pourquoi est-ce que tout le monde ici parle français*. He chuckled, then gave a rapid and lengthy reply, of which I understood little except that he was traveling with eighty colleagues to New York, Chicago, and San Francisco for a *dégustation* excursion. A roving band of French food critics? Wine tasters? (Although they wouldn't go to New

York or Chicago for that.) At last, I found myself racing home on the 101 (I had left the car in long-term parking, on the company's dime, of course) to Lucie's open arms. "Never again shall we be parted!" I cried, overjoyed and very much relieved.

§ **January 22.** . Lucie and I this morning said to each other, "We're quite broke!" We figured we had only a certain amount of money to last throughout the next week. We then proceeded to go to the Burlington Coat Factory, where I purchased two hats (one black, one brown), a vest, a plain black tie (I had none), a tuxedo shirt, and an eggplant-coloured velvet coat for a measly \$144, but which left me even more lean of pocket than I had been this morning. It was decided we would save money by eating soup and apples. On the way home, we ducked into Anthropologie long enough to drop \$1,500 (I charged it, naturally) on a splendid naïve painting, presumably of 19th-c. French origin, of an anthropomorphic kingfisher dressed in breeches, vest, cravat, &c., fishing from a creek. How well it will look in our apartment!

The evening we spent at the Edwardian Ball. When we arrived, the music being played was most excellent: Prokofiev, Strauss waltzes, Sousa, the "1812 Overture", &c., but sadly it grew progressively worse throughout the evening, disappointingly inappropriate given the standards set earlier. By the time we left they were playing tunes one was likely to hear at any number of speakeasies down the street. It gave Lucie and me the idea to become DJs ourselves (if you want it done right...), specializing in: Victorian Music, Historical Recordings, The Flapper Era (or The Jazz Age), &c. I might choose the moniker DJ Durtal, after Huysmans' protagonist of *Là-bas*; Lucie could be DJ Madame Chantelouve (a character from the aforementioned tome) but I haven't pitched this idea to her yet. It remains to have calling cards printed and to acquire the necessary equipment. The sartorial splendour at this event was marvelous; most attendees did dress for the occasion, while those who did not stood out like village idiots. Ms. J. T., a local chanteuse, kept walking by us and making eye contact, so we introduced ourselves and spoke for some time about the Hypnodrome, her music, and silent film (when I mentioned Lucien Désar's fine music to several Silent Ghost Cinema films, her eyes narrowed defensively at the threat of this new competition). Our only other contacts during the evening were a musician called simply "Mighty Steve" (or Mike, or something), a dandy balloon artist called Michaelangeli and his drunken, lesbian, Russian companion, Katja, and a local vintage clothier with a face like a ham called Gus.

We watched with some embarrassment as Katja, whose dress kept slipping off her bony frame, writhed suggestively before any woman who passed nearby. Meanwhile, Gus had formed an attachment to Lucie and me. We had found him rather interesting until he opened his mouth; now, we couldn't get rid of him. It seems he's a pal of my step-cousin Henryka, who I should probably telephone one of these days. A couple of gin and tonics later, we bid adieu to Gus, Michaelangeli, and Katja and headed home, worn out by the conversation, beverages, and loud music. It was only when I had begun to undress that I realised I had misplaced my wallet. I sped back to the ball and regarded the throng with dismay. Presently, two gentleman asked me if I had lost my wallet. I said I had, and they replied that "some dude who looked like a fucking vampire or something" had found it. "He had a cape, with red lining, and he was tall." Armed with this vague description, I surveyed the premises for tall vampiric gentlemen with red-lined capes. I had begun to give up when I beheld Mighty Steve from earlier. "Did you lose your wallet?" he asked. When I replied in the affirmative, he produced my wallet. He was tall, but wasn't wearing a cape, nor did he resemble in any fashion a vampire. However, none of this mattered to me. I embraced Mighty Steve and kissed his cheeks in gratitude. Both of us were laughing with joy, more joy than the occasion warranted, in truth. Satisfied, I shook his hand warmly and returned home to watch the silent *Camille* (1921), chiefly for Natacha Rambova's sets and costumes, which did not disappoint. To bed afterwards, exhausted.

§ **January 25.** . In an attempt to alleviate a large cavity in my bank account, I have taken on additional paid employment in the form of tutelage. I met my first client this evening, a fourth-grader called Kiabeth; my task is to help her improve her reading skills. Little did I know how dull it would be, but dull it was, and how! I was able to conceal my ennui (something I am quite adept at) but the underachieving youngster commenced to yawning violently halfway through our session. I tried to make it more fun for her but my jests were each met with a poker face. As I drove home across the Bay Bridge, hungry, longing for Lucie, I revived my mind by means of some lively music, in this case "Stars and Stripes Fovever", which did the trick. However, near the Fifth Street ramp, I was menaced by a driver in a red sports car, who weaved impatiently as he tried to pass me without success. As we waited for the light to turn green, his car suddenly lurched forward, bumping mine with teeth-chattering force. I got out to survey the damage,

half-expecting to be gunned down; to my relief, the driver turned out to be a harmless beefhead. He tried to make out like everything was jake, “Ees no damage!”, while I regarded him dubiously. When I made a drinking gesture with my hand, he shook his head, “No no no.” I thanked him for his patience, then timed my departure so he would miss the next green light.

I adore driving, especially trips on obscure back roads, but not in the city, which is an unmitigated headache, nor on busy superhighways. I grip the wheel tightly, shoulders hunched, driving under the speed limit as other cars race by with blaring klaxons, waiting for the impact which never comes. I expect encounters like the abovementioned to happen with great frequency; when they do not, I simply chalk it up to dumb luck. Lucie and I have decided that when our flivver pips out at last, rather than spend a fortune keeping it running, we’ll give up driving altogether. Kenneth, however, a collector of vintage automobiles, has suggested we keep our parking space so he can park one of his cars there; in return, we can drive it as often as we wish. Part of me hopes it would be the little 2CV, but we’ll see!

§ **January 31.** . Near midnight, more drama on our street, as Lucie and I were awakened to the sounds of police bullhorns, “Come out with your hands up, &c.!” We regarded the scene below, seven police cars with lights flashing, weapons drawn, flashlights on nearby rooftops, gawking bystanders. Presently, two suspects were led out of the alley and into a paddy wagon. The cats were uninterested, not surprisingly. I placed my ear against Loulou, listening to the waves of purrs as the ocean in a conch. Show over, back to bed.

Happily, I am reading Huysmans again. *Les Soeurs Vatar*, his second novel, is a “lewd but exact” naturalistic account of the lives and loves of that “bizarre race of young women” who work as bookbinders. I would give, say, two fingers, or, a finger and a toe, to be able to fluently read Huysmans in the original French; as it is, James Babcock’s translation preserves much of Huysmans’ peculiar, flamboyant vocabulary which I so adore and which elicits a chuckle on every delightful page.

I’ve not much else to report, save that I am an uncle. The expected news, second-hand from Father, went in one ear and out the other as if the event had never happened; I’ll believe little Elzbieta exists when I see her with mine own eyes. In the meantime, poor Peter! Does he even know what he’s in for? One can only imagine, bringing a child into the cold, cruel world! I couldn’t do it, I tell you. I’ve not the nerve nor the gall.



§ **February 1.** J. has brought to my attention an article in *The Times* about a couple who live as if time had frozen somewhere around 1940, which has elicited in me quite a bit of introspection. While anachronistic living has its appeal, I would not, for example, wish to use sixty year-old tooth powder or eschew modern medicine. While I have always regarded the past as a treasure trove to be enjoyed, I willfully avoid certain aspects of the present; I won't use a portable telephone, for example; in fact, we've been thinking about switching over to a rotary dial (our current phone looks like one, but it has buttons); what stops us is only the expense. When "1940s House", "Manor House", "Regency House Party", et al. aired on television, I lapped them up, sick with delight as I imagined myself in the rôle of, say, scullery maid. Time travel to divers times in the past, especially the 1890s and the 1920s, has always been a great fantasy of mine, but I have always wondered, if, were it to really happen, would I reject my adopted era and long for yet an earlier one? Were gramophones, telephones, or penicillin introduced to the world for the first time, would I turn my nose up at them? I don't *think* I would, thus there must be something inherently objectionable about the 21st century. When I am a withered old curmudgeon (who says I'm not already?) I find the idea of a nostalgia for the present unimaginable; I'll have no more an interest in the year 2005 than I do at the moment, which is to say, none at all.

§ **February 3.** . Last night in bed, Lucie read aloud to me a proposed shopping list and suggested daily menus from *The Wise Encyclopedia of Cooking*, a fat green tome from the '40s bound in a queer, synthetic material I couldn't identify. The contrast between what people ate then and now is remarkable; conspicuously absent, of course, were processed foods. I noted how large the meals seemed; each had several courses, although undoubtedly the portions were relatively small. We found this information oddly inspirational, although Lucie and I already eat a rather old-fashioned diet; the only thing distinctly modern about ours is its inclusion of organic foodstuffs, which were generally unavailable in the '40s. It remains to be seen how Lucie lets it influence her, as she is the one who plans and prepares our meals. Oh, I did at last find out what blancmange is, although I must admit I'm a bit disappointed; perhaps it's better than it sounds?

After we turned out the light, our conversation turned from meals to topics of a darker nature. We discussed how mankind has entered what I call the New Dark Ages; how we as a species have crossed a threshold of sorts

over which there is no return, whereby we become increasingly selfish and self-destructive. Our want for self-actualization is diminishing in favour of the satisfaction of the moment, of baser pursuits consonant to those of the lesser-evolved primates. Done on such a massive scale, it is beyond any one man to reverse the trend, but perhaps if we acted collectively? One would first have to convince one's neighbor of the error of his ways, not by pacing the streets waving a placard in the air like so many lunatics, but perhaps by means of asserting in society the finer manners, such as hat doffing. Be conspicuous in one's pursuit of the sublime rather than the banal, and people will ask in wonder, "What is that heavenly scent?" or "Where did you get that lovely *foulard*?" I'm just being silly...of course we are all doomed; however, oddly, this realisation doesn't discourage me from trying anyway.

After accompanying Lucie to the train *dépôt*, I returned home to make the beds, Hoover the rugs, and tidy up. As I left again to go to the office, I was oblig'd to apply the brakes as three men leapt in front of the car, engaged in mortal combat! Two white gentlemen, pink around the neck and adorned with Texas Longhorn baseball caps, were beating and swearing at a rather dirty-looking Latin gentleman. There being many witnesses, I negotiated a wide arc around the spectacle and continued on my way, symbolically doffing my hat as I passed.

Spring has arrived suddenly, bringing with it warmer temperatures, punishing sunlight and cheeping birds. I am most comfortable in a cool, foggy climate, thus in many ways San Francisco is ideal. However, I am oblig'd to admit a certain joy upon the prospect of the buds and blooms of the local flora, which is especially lovely in California. I suppose I'm disappointed that we didn't get many storms this winter, and now it's over.

It's 5:12, the sun is setting over the bay, and the office has grown dim and silent but for the sounds of Bartók playing softly behind me. Two dogs bark wildly; in fact, they've been barking wildly for some time now at a man with a grocery cart who is fussing with some oily rags. A bird cheeps in a nearby branch; a car approaches, its stereo emitting a steady stream of throbbing obscenities, rattling the building and causing my souvenir Arc de Triomphe to inch towards the edge of my desk. I'll answer some correspondence for the next twenty minutes or so, until I have to leave for my tutoring appointment. This is a lonely time of the evening, when I would rather be walking home from the *dépôt* with Lucie, arm-in-arm, recounting to each other the day's events, sharing ideas, and people watching. Instead, I won't be home until 8:00 after having driven over the Bay Bridge in the dark. I feel cast off, like

a piece of jetsam in the open seas; at such moments, I am oft subjected to spells of nervousness which increase in intensity and frequency until I am reunited with Lucie, thus my dependency upon her is not only psychological but physical, a fervent, profound bond which could never be duplicated. How I hate working evenings!

§ **February 4.** . A morning of domestic bliss chez Vodrázka. After sleeping in, Lucie and I took our breakfast of English muffins with homemade blood orange marmalade and sheep's milk yogurt. Lucie sat down to answer correspondence while I indulged my love for lying on the floor and staring out the window at the morning grisaille while listening to headphones – to-day it's *Stokowski Conducts a Russian Spectacular*. As expected, Ms. Moppet came over to see what I was doing; we engage in a sort of slow-motion bout of wrestling whereby I repeatedly grab her, hug and pet her, then let her go while she purrs and meows contentedly. Everything was fine until she spotted a gnat; my chest still smarts from whence she launched herself after the fugitive pest. Soon, however, Mr. Darcy had taken his sister's place, albeit in a more contrary but playful mood, as he grabbed the CD case, batted my pen, or lay upon my notebook.

Later, I accompanied Lucie to the hair salon then took care of divers errands – to the cleaner's to drop off a suit jacket, the druggist's to procure balloons, and Virgin to track down a few elusive recordings, which they of course didn't have. On the way back to the salon I bumped into a rather ill-looking Bruno, his cheeks and eye sockets sunken and dark. He related to me his health woes, then we chatted a few moments about our mutual love for Stokowski; it was Bruno who introduced me to him years ago.

After stopping by John Walker's for the Herbsainte we requested, we decided we should dine at Celia's. Dinner was in fact disastrous, as our order was fouled up; when we were given what we had asked for, it tasted as if from the can. Service was provided sporadically and grudgingly by a gentleman with duck lips. I don't think we shall ever return, for there are too many superiour restaurants which we can patronize, although I will miss its proximity to the beach, the swirling fog, and the rumble of the streetcars, which lent to the atmosphere a very San Franciscan aspect.

Kenneth wrote to let us know his illness has taken a turn for the worse and that he is quitting his business and collecting disability. In an effort to simplify his complicated life, he has offered to give us his Bavarian Motor Works automobile, explaining that he doesn't have a place to park it. We

declined the offer, but will take it temporarily to solve his immediate problem; in the end we'll have to give it back because another automobile, even a free one, would be a burden to us. Besides, he could sell it, as the money will come in handy if medical expenses get out of hand. We're meeting at his place tomorrow to discuss the details while Lucie makes us potato and leek soup for dinner. It occurs to me that this might be a good time for Kenneth to finish his film, or perhaps return to painting.

Meanwhile, time is running out for <http://www.st-brigid.org> St. Brigid's Church, a fine example of Richardson Romanesque architecture slated for demolition in the name of the almighty dollar. I have followed this story closely since the decision was made in 2000 by Archbishop John Quinn, who I hold fully responsible for this scandal – there, I've said it – it's a *scandal*, and it's shameful. Why couldn't he have chosen a less important building? Of course, the Catholic church plans to sell the property and use the proceeds to, get this, to help pay off the costs of pending priest abuse lawsuits against the Archdiocese. Since the Catholic church is unwilling or unable to do the right thing, I do hope the city is. We'll see! I have uncharacteristically written to the Committee To Save St. Brigid Church to volunteer my assistance in whatever way possible.

**§ February 6.** . A placid day at the library, as *tout le monde* is glued to their television sets watching The Super Bowl. Frankly, I don't see what all the hysteria is about; I saw the Harlem Globetrotters when I was still wearing short trousers and I wasn't at all impressed by all those balls twirling around. Besides, when you've seen Tiger Woods make one home run, you've seen them all, in my opinion. I'm going to do my best to *not* learn who won, nor who is even playing in the blasted thing, which I wish I didn't have to know about in the first place, but I'll probably have the information forced upon me by this time to-morrow, information which will occupy precious brain cells which could be used for more erudite knowledge, like a recipe for blancmange.

As I said, a placid day, but that's not quite right. A pretty little French girl just fell down before the circulation desk with a loud *boom*, her books and ponytails flying. The mother saying, “ça va?”, taking the embarrassed child's hand. A beefheaded Baby Huey-type wearing a filthy puffy jacket with the words “United States of America” has been sitting before the public internet terminal all afternoon, reading soft-pornographic cartoons and snickering loudly while jiggling his leg nervously; the caption on the screen,

which I can see from my desk, reads, “Sexy Losers”. I want to tell him to pipe down and stop looking at whatever it is he’s looking at, but it’s all so unpleasant, you know. Meanwhile, the Elevator Lady has taken the elevator on three occasions to-day, when she has perfectly good legs and the stairs are right *there*; besides, she hasn’t entered the library itself once, while the rest of the municipal building is dark and closed. What is she up to? I want to say something to her, but what’s it all for?

Lucie is sitting by the window answering correspondence while I am plagued by questions much dumber than the ones never asked, at regular intervals as to preclude concentration on my own writing. What brings them to the library, when they could be at home watching Tiger Woods, besides soft-pornographic cartoons and unlimited rides in the elevator? But I’m not being fair. The answer, based on reference questions asked so far: Indian costumes; “Eye Spy” books, asked for by a cute little boy who looked a little too old for “Eye Spy” books; *The Confessions of Max Tivoli* by a batty-looking woman with a severe face lift; a video of *Romeo and Juliet* for a man in a leather vest (who we see every Sunday in the playground pushing his grandson in the swing); a biography of Mohammed, desired by a young girl in a niqab; a book about the flora of Northern California; a copy of the Patriot Act, sought by an intelligent-looking schoolgirl, and a video of *The Power of Myth*, wanted by the girl’s mother who had the most acrid breath I have ever had blown in my face.

Here am I, chronicling a list of reference questions for posterity as if anyone would want to read such a list. Lately, I’ve been justifiably self-conscious about my perpetual inability to produce anything of artistic merit, while the people around me are painting, drawing, recording albums, scoring silent films, making films, &c. There are three types of artists – those who create regularly and finish the projects they begin; those who dabble, starting one thing then quickly being distracted by another, in the end never really accomplishing anything (this describes me); those who are all talk and no action (this used to be me). Thus, I’m making progress, I tell myself, doubtfully.

A young German woman has asked to use the internet. I led her to Baby Huey and said to him, “Excuse me, Sir, this young lady needs to use the computer. I told her you wouldn’t mind giving up yours, since you’ve occupied it all afternoon.” He seemed annoyed but attempted to conceal it. “No problem. I’ve just been *reading*,” he replied curtly, as he closed all the copies of Internet Explorer which had been open, each with a “Sexy Losers” cartoon on it. One second later, he was gone at last; the air is already fresher.

I now regard the schoolgirl, whose jeans are worn *much* too low for decency, exposing what is normally seen only among doubled-over plumbers.

I've not much else to say just now, although something compels me to mention that the heater is on full steam even though it is a warm, sunny day. I've opened all the doors in the building and several windows, but the heat is intense; what an infernal waste of energy. Only one hour to go before Lucie and I are on our way home across the Golden Gate Bridge, these petty troubles behind me.

§ **February 8.** . I'm in trouble with the authorities! I have received a citation for running a stop sign, which is simply preposterous. I made the officer repeat what I had done, just to hear his choice of words, which made it sound like I breezed right through the blasted thing with nary a brake light (one is burned out, actually, but he didn't say anything about that!). I honestly don't recall what I did; perhaps I made what's called a "California stop". Now I'm oblig'd to waste a day of my life at "traffic school", the very thought of which makes me shudder with disgust. How utterly humiliating.

Lucie has started her new painting class, which is filled to capacity and taught by a "commercial" artist, whatever that is; I saw her portfolio, which consisted of Sears & Roebuck-style portraiture, which I found confusing. Likewise, the instructor was similarly confused by Lucie's hauntingly surreal portrait of a drowned woman; the two are operating on mutually exclusive planes of existence. Upon my arrival to pick up Lucie, I was informed by her that she has volunteered my modeling services for the next session. I was afraid it might end up like this; a failed artist who has to model to make ends meet.

Because our apartment is too small to make messes in with paints and whatnot, I've decided to return to collage as a creative outlet. (I'll get back to that novel one of these days, I promise.) This afternoon I shall stop by a local salvage company for some crusty old books and magazines with nice pictures in them, although the last time I did so I was discouraged by the exorbitant prices – they think they've got a warehouse full of antiques! On other artistic fronts, Dedalus has rejected my offer to translate Huysmans' *Les soeurs Vatard*; they said they plan publish no more Huysmans after *Marthe*. So much for that scheme!

Meanwhile, I've been commuting to the office every day this week in order to teach a delegation of Koreans how to use our products. When I

first met them, I was appalled to find one of them seated on the floor in Jared's office, undoubtedly too polite to demand a proper chair. I rushed back to my office and sent to Jared a courriel entitled "Korean Etiquette and Protocol", but I fear it's too late. Fortunately, I had the foresight to study it last week; my greetings in their native tongue were well received by the dignified, well-dressed group. How barbaric we must seem to them!

§ **February 9.** . Recalling Andrew's stories about his father's experiences in Korea, I thought I had better memorize a document I found on the internet called Korean Etiquette & Protocol. After meeting with the Korean delegation all day, I was amazed at the benefits of having done so; in particular, the section entitled "Business Card Etiquette" was spot-on. After introducing myself to each of the delegates in Korean, *anyong hasmnika?* (this seemed to please them very much), we each exchanged business cards using both hands. Following the etiquette to a "T", I placed their cards on the table before me and glanced at them several times throughout the day, noting that the delegates did the same with mine. The lecture went rather smoothly; one of the gentlemen spoke acceptable English and during breaks we conversed about language and cultural matters. When he mentioned something about South Korea's success in the World Cup preliminaries, to my relief I recognized his remark to have something to do with the sport of soccer and was able to make a couple of convincing remarks about the subject in general. As it grew dark, Jared stuck his head in the door of the conference room and let it be known he couldn't drive the delegates to their hotel. I offered to take them, and on the way, they asked for my advice about how to get to the city, what to see and do, &c. Upon pulling up to the hotel, we all got out of the car, and, shaking each one's hand, said, *anyonghi gasipsiyo!* As I got back into the car, the three made no move to walk away and I got the disturbing feeling they were expecting something else, perhaps a kiss on the cheeks? As I drove away we waved to each other, and, turning the corner onto University Avenue I felt an enormous sense of relief that it was all over and that I hadn't botched things up.